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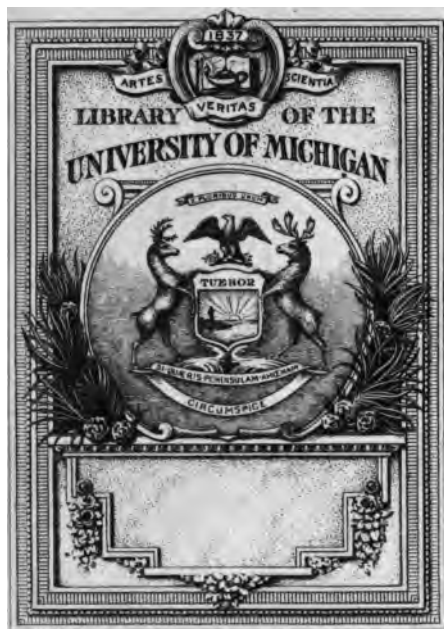
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Light

Light

A NARRATIVE POEM

BY
JOAQUIN MILLER



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BOSTON
1907

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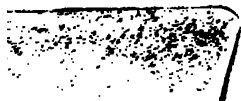
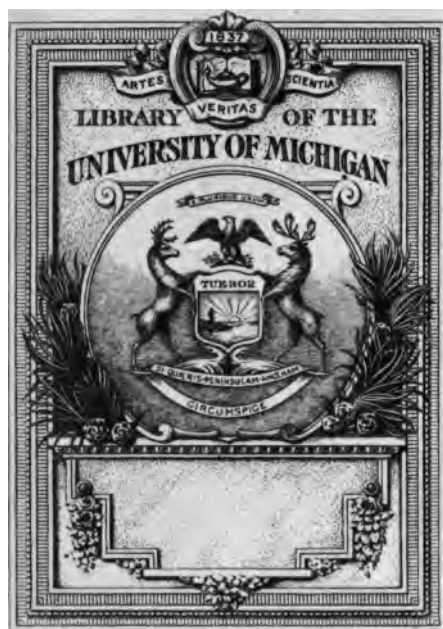
AN ASPIRATION

LET me explain that this was penned amid the scenes described, in order to get the color, action, and atmosphere, and that from time to time fragments were in print during my wanderings; so you may find bits in the book not entirely new. But as these were photographs, so far as I could make them, they must remain unchanged.

My aspiration is and ever has been, in my dim and uncertain way, to be a sort of Columbus — or a Cortez. "And if I perish, I perish."

But I need room. I need not only the latitude but even the longitude of all known oceans and of all glorious nature to sail these uncharted buccaneer seas. For the tribute of song and story must be not only worthy them but of sympathetic interest and sincere concern to you, my ardent reader.

Besides and above all, despising the hazard of new work and ways, I aspire to picture the matchless, magnificent, and terrible splendors of our gold-strown and flame-fed Arctic Empire.



M 648

cop. 2



CANTO I

I

A YUCCA crowned in creamy bloom,
A yucca freighted with perfume,
Breathed fragrance up the blossomed steep;
The warm sea winds lay half asleep,
Lay drowsing in the dreamy wold
By Saint Francisco's tawny Bay,
As if to fold, forever fold,
Worn, wearied wings and rest away
In careless, languid Arcady.

II

Some clean, lean Eucalyptus trees,
Wind-torn and tossing to the blue,
Kept ward above the silent two
Who sat the fragrant sundown seas
Above the sounding Golden Gate
Nor questioned overmuch of fate;

L I G H T

For she was dowered, gold on gold,
With wealth of face and form untold!
And he was proud and passionate.

III

Ten thousand miles of mobile sea —
This sea of all seas blent as one
Wide, unbound book of mystery,
Of awe, of sibyl prophecy,
Ere yet a ghost or misty ken
Of God's far, first Beginning when
Vast darkness lay upon the deep;
As when God's spirit moved upon
Such waters cradled in such sleep
Such night as never yet knew dawn,
Such night as weird atallaph weaves
But never mortal man conceives.

IV

He looked to heaven, God; but she
Saw only his face and the sea.
He said — his fond face leaned to hers,
The warmest of God's worshipers —
"In the beginning? Where and when,
Before the fashioning of men,
Swung first His high lamps to and fro,
To light us as we please to go?

L I G H T

And where the waters, dark deeps when
God spake, and said, 'Let there be light'?
They still house where they housed, as then,
Dark curtained with majestic night —
Dusk Silence, in travail of Light
That knew not man or man's, at all —
Steel battle-ship or wood-built wall.

V

"Aye, these, these were the waters when
God spake and knew His fair first-born —
That silent, new-born baby morn,
Such eons ere the noise of men.
His Southern Cross, high-built about
The deep, set in a town of stars,
Commemorates, forbids a doubt
That here first fell God's golden bars —
Red bars, with soft, white silver blent,
Broad sown from sapphire firmament.

VI

"Behold what wave-lights leap and run
Swift up the shale from out the sea
Inwove with silver, gold and sun!
Light lingers in the tawny mane
Of wild oats waving lazily
Far upon the climbing poppy plain;

L I G H T

Far up yon steep of dusk and dawn —
Black night, white light, inwound as one.
But when, when fell that far, first dawn
With ways of gold to walk upon?

VII

“I know not when, but only know
That darkness lay upon yon deep,
Lay cradled, as a child asleep,
And that God’s spirit moved upon
These waters ere the burst of dawn
When first His high lamps to and fro
Swung forth to guide which way to go.

VIII

“I only know that Silence keeps
High court forever still hereon,
That Silence lords alone these deeps,
The silence of God’s house, and keeps
Inviolat yon water’s face.
As if still His abiding place,
As ere that far, first burst of dawn
Ere fretful man set sail upon.

IX

“The deeps,” he mused, are still, as when
Dusk Silence kept her curtained bed
Low moaning for the birth of dawn,

L I G H T

When she should push black night aside,
As some ghoul nightmare most abhorred —
When she might laughing look upon
God's first-born glory, holy Light —
As when fond Eve exulting cried,
In mother-pain, with mother-pride,
"Behold the fair first-born of men!
I gat a man-child of the Lord!"

X

As one discerning some sweet nook
Of wild oats, mantling yellow, pink,
Will pass, then turn and turn to look,
Then pass again to think and think,
Then try to not turn back again,
But try and try to quite forget
And, sighing, try and try in vain;
So you would turn and turn again
To her, her girlish woman's grace —
Full-flowered yet fond baby's face.

XI

Her wide, sweet mouth, an opened rose,
Pushed out, reached out, as if to kiss;
A mobile mouth in proud repose
This moment, then unlike to this
As storm to calm, as day to night,

L I G H T

As sullen darkness to swift light;
This new-made woman was, the sun
And surged sea interwound in one.

XII

Her proud and ample lips pushed out
As kissing sea-winds unaware;
And then they arched in angry pout,
As if she cared yet did not care.
Then lightning lit her great, wide eyes,
As if black thunder walled the skies,
And all things took some touch of her,
The while she stood nor deigned to stir:
The while she saw with vision dim —
Saw all things, yet saw only him.

XIII

Such eyes as compass all the skies,
That see all things yet naught have seen;
Such eyes of love or sorrow's eyes —
A martyr or a Magdalene?
How sad that all great souls are sad!
How sad that gladness is not glad —
That Love's sad sister is sweet Pain,
That only lips of beauty drain
Life's full-brimmed, glittering goblet dry,
And only drain the cup to die!

L I G H T

XIV

The yellow of her poppy hair
Was as red gold is, when at rest;
But when aroused was as the west
In sunset flame and then — take care!
Her tall, free-fashioned, supple form
Was now some sudden, tropic storm,
Was now some lily leaned at play.
What sea and sun, sunshine and shower,
Full flowered ere the noon of day,
Full June ere yet the morn of May,
This sun-born blossom of an hour —
Precocious Californian flower!

XV

She answered not but looked away
With brown hand arched above her brow, —
As peers a boatman from his prow, —
To where white sea-doves wheeled at play.
She watched them long, then turned and sighed
And looking in his face she cried,
While blushing prettily, “Behold,
There is no mateless dove, not one!
And see! not one unhappy dove,
Ten thousand circling in the sun,
Entangled as the mesh of fate,
Yet each remains as true as gold

L I G H T

And constant courts his pretty mate.
See here! See there! Behold, above —
I think each dove would die for love.”
He watched the shallows spume the shore
And fleck the shelly, drifting shale,
Then far at sea his swift eyes swept
Where one tall, stately, snow-white sail
Its silent course majestic kept
And gloried in its alien mood,
As his own soul in solitude

XVI

“The shallows murmur and complain,
The shallows turn with wind and tide,
They fringe with froth and moil the main;
They wail and will not be denied —
Poor, puny babes, unsatisfied!

XVII

“The lighthouse clings her beetling steep
Above the rock-sown, ragged shore
Where Scylla and Charybdis roar
And dangers lurk and shallows keep
Mad tumult in the house of sleep.
The shallows moan and moan away —
The deeps have not one word to say.

L I G H T

XVIII

"I reckon Silence as a grace
That was ere light had name or place;
A saint enshrined ere hand was laid
To fashioning of man or maid.
For, storm or calm, or sun or shade,
Fair Silence never truth betrayed;
For, ocean deep or dappled sky,
Saint Silence never told a lie."

CANTO II

I

FROM out the surge of Sutro's steep,
Beyond the Gate a rock uprears,
So sudden, savage, unawares
The very billows start and leap,
As frightened at its lifted face,
So shoreless, sealess, out of place:
A sea-washed, surge-locked isle, as lone
As lorn Napoleon on his throne —
His Saint Helena throne, where still
The dazed world in dumb wonder turns
To his high throned, imperious will
And incense burns and ever burns.
Here huge sea-lions climb and cling,
Despite of surge and sethe and shock,

L I G H T

The topmost limit of the rock,
And one is named Napoleon, king.
Behold him lord the land, the sea,
In lone, unquestioned majesty!

II

She saw, she raised alert her head
With eager face and cheery said:
"What lusty, upheaved, bull-built neck!
What lungs to lift above the roar!
What captain on his quarter-deck
To mock the sea and scorn the shore!
I like that scar across his breast,
I like his ardent, lover's zest!"

III

The huge sea-beast uprose, uprose,
As if to surely topple down;
He reached his black and bearded nose
Above his harem, gray, black, brown,
Sleek, shining, wet or steaming dry,
And mouthed and mouthed against the sky.

IV

What eloquence, what hot love pain!
What land but this, what love but his?
What isle of bliss but this and this —
To roar and love and roar again?

L I G H T

What land, what love but this his own,
Loud thundered from his slippery throne;
Loud thundered in his Sappho's ear,
As if she could not, would not hear.

V

At last her heart was moved and she
Raised two bright eyes to his black beard,
Then sudden turned, as if she feared,
And threw her headlong in the sea,
Another Sappho, all for love.
While Phaon towered still above —
An instant only; yet once more
That upheaved head, that great bull neck,
That sea-born, bossed, bull-throated roar —
A poise, a plunge, a flash, a fleck,
And far down, caverned in the deep,
Where sea-green curtains swing and sweep
And varicolored carpets creep,
Soft emerald or amethyst,
Two lion lovers kept sweet tryst.

VI

She looked, looked long, then smiled, then sighed,
A proud, pure soul unsatisfied,
Then sat dense grasses suddenly
And thrust a foot above the sea.
She threw her backward, arms wide out,

L I G H T

And up the poppy-spangled steep
O'er grass-set cushions sown in gold,
As she would sleep yet would not sleep.
She reached her wide hands fast about
And grasses, gold and manifold,
Of lowly blossoms, pink and blue,
She gathered in and laughing threw,
With bare-armed, heedless, happy grace —
Threw fragrant handfuls in his face.
And then as if to sleep she lay,
A babe nursed at the breast of May —
Lay back with wide eyes to the skies
And clouds of wondrous butterflies;
Such Mariposa blooms in air!
Such bloomy, golden, poppy hair!
And which were hers or poppy's gold
Without close care none could have told;
And which were butterflies or bloom,
To guess there was not guessing room,
The while, in quest of sweets or rest,
They fanned her face, they kissed her breast.

VII

That face like to a lilt of song —
A face of sea-shell tint, with tide
Of springtime flowing fast and strong
And fearless in its maiden pride —

L I G H T

Such rich rose ambushed in such hair
Of heedless, wind-kissed, poppy gold,
Blown here, blown there, blown anywhere,
Soft-lifting, falling fold on fold,
As made gold poppies where she lay
Turn envious, turn green as May!
What wise face yet what wilful face,
A face that would not be denied
No more than gipsy winds that race
The sea bank in their saucy pride;
A form that knew yet only knew
The natural, the human, true.

VIII

Those two round mounds of Nineveh,
What treasures of the past they knew!
But these two round mounds here to-day
Hold treasures richer far than they,
And prophecies more truly true.
Old Nineveh's twin mounds are dust;
They only know the ghostly past;
But these two new mounds hold in trust
The awful future, hold the vast
Unbounded empire, land or sea,
Henceforth, for all eternity.
Let pass dead pasts; far wiser turn
And delve the future; love and learn.

L I G H T

IX

It seems she dreamed. She slept, we know,
A happy, quiet little space,
Then thrust a round limb far below
And half-way turned aside her face,
And then she threw her arms wide out
In sleep, and so reached blind about,
As if for something she might find
From fortune-telling, gipsy wind.

X

The soft, warm winds from far away
Were weary, and they crept so near
They lay against her willing ear
As if they had so much to say.
And she, she seemed so glad to hear
The while she loving, sleeping lay
And dreamed of love nor dreamed of doubt,
But laughing thrust her form far out
And down the fragrant poppy steep
In playful, restless, happy sleep.
She sighed, she heaved her hilly breast,
As one who would but could not rest.

XI

How natural, how free, how fair,
The while the happy winds on wings,

L I G H T

As larger butterflies, laid bare
A rippled, braided rim of white
And outstretched ankles exquisite.
What arms to hold a babe at breast —
Such breast as prudist never guessed!
What shapely limbs, what everything
That makes great woman great and good —
That makes for proud, pure motherhood!

XII

Such thews as mount the steeps of morn,
Such limbs as love, not lust shall share,
Such legs as God has shaped to bear
The weight of ages, worlds unborn;
Such limbs as Lesbian shrines revealed
When comely, longing mothers kneeled;
Such thews as Phidias loved to hew,
Such limbs as Leighton loved to draw
When painting tall, Greek girls at play;
Such legs as blind old Homer saw,
As Marlowe knew but yesterday,
When Helen climbed in dreams for him
Her cloud-topped towers of Ilium.

L I G H T

CANTO III

I

WHITE sea-gulls glistened in the sun—
Ten thousand if a single one—
And every sea-dove knew his mate.
Far, far at sea, the Farallones
Sent up a million plaintive moans
From sea-beasts moaning love, or hate.
The sun sank weary, flushed and worn,
The warm sea-winds sank tattered, torn,
The sun and sea lay welded, wed;
The day lay crouched upon the deep
Half closed, as eyes half closed in sleep,
Half closed, as some good book half read.

II

The sea was as an opal sea
Inlaid with scintillating light,
Yet close about and left and right
The sea lay banked and bossed in night,
As black as ever night may be.

III

The sundown sea all sudden then
Lay argent, pallid, white as death.
As when some great thing dies; as when

L I G H T

A god gasps in one final breath
And heaves full length his somber bed.
The sundown sea now shone, mobile,
Translucent, flaming, molten steel,
Red, green, then tenfold more than red,
And then of every hue, a hint
Of doubloons spilling from the mint,
Alternate, changing, manifold,
Yet melting, minting all to gold.

IV

Far mountain peaks flashed flecks of gold
And dashed with dappled flecks the skies.
"Behold," said he, "the fleecy fold
Now slowly, surely, homeward hies.
Such cobalt blue, such sheep of gold,
Such gold as hath not place or name
In elsewhere land, because no seer
Hath seen or dauntless prophet told
Where stood the loom in primal peace
That wove the fair, first golden fleece.
Behold, what gold-flecked flocks of Light!
Ten million moving sheep of gold,
Wee lambs of gold that nudge their dams,
Great hornèd, wrinkled, heady rams!

L I G H T

v

"Slow-shepherded, the golden sheep,
With bent horns lowered to the deep,
Come home; the hollows of the sea
Receive and house them lovingly.
The little lambs of Light come home
And house them in the argent foam,
The while He counts them every one,
And shuts the Gate, for day is done.

vi

"Aye, day is done, the dying sun
Sinks wounded unto death to-night;
A great, hurt swan, he sinks to rest,
His wings all crimson, blood his breast!
What wide, low wings, reached left and right,
He sings, and night and swan are one —
One huge black swan of Helicon.

vii

"What crimson breast, what crimson wings
The while he dies, and dying sings!
Yet safe is housed the happy fold,
The golden sheep, the fleece of gold
That lured the dauntless Argonaut —
The fleece that daring Jason sought."

L I G H T

VIII

She waking sighed, soft murmuring,
As waters from some wood-walled spring:
"Oh happy, huge, horn-headed rams,
To guide and lead the golden fleece,
To ward the fold of fat increase
Fast mated to your golden dams!
With bridal gold, what golden bride,
What golden twin lambs, side by side!
Oh happy, happy nudging lambs,
Thrice happy, happy golden dams!'

IX

His face was still against the west;
For still a flush of gold was there
That would not or that could not rest,
But seemed some night bird of the air.
At last, with half-averted head
And dreamfully, as dreaming, said:
"What banker gathers yonder gold
That sinks, sea-washed, beyond the deeps?
Lie there no sands to house and hold
This sunset gold in countless heaps?
There sure must be some far, fierce land,
Some Guinea shore, some fire-fed strand,
Some glowing, palm-set, pathless spot
Where all this sunset gold is stored,

L I G H T

As misers gather hoard on board.
There sure must be, beyond this sea,
Some Argo's gold, some argosy,
Some golden fleece, long since forgot,
To wait the coming Argonaut."

x

She sprang up sudden, savagely,
And flushed, and paled, looked far away,
Grinding gold poppies with her heel.
She could not say, she could but feel.
She nothing said, because that they
Who really feel can rarely say.
And then she looked up, forth and far,
And pointed to the pale North Star,
The while her color went and came
From pink to white, from frost to flame.

xI

For this, the one forbidden theme,
The one hard, dread, unquiet dream
That he should go, lead forth and far
Below the triple Arctic star,
As he had planned; and now to speak,
To hint — she heard with pallid cheek.
Hard had she tried, had fain forgot
How strong, strange men were trending far

L I G H T

Against this cold, elusive star,
And he their Jason — Argonaut!

CANTO IV

I

HOW passing fair, how wondrous fair
This daughter of the yellow sun!
Her sunlit length and strength of hair
Seemed sun and gold inwound in one.
How strangely silent, unaware,
Unconscious quite of strength or grace
Or peril of her beauteous face,
She stood, the first-born of a race,
A proud, new race, scarce yet begun.
How tall she stood, free debonair —
How stately and how supple, tall,
The time she loosened and let fall
Her tossed and mighty Titian hair!

II

So beautiful she was, as one
From out some priceless picture-book!
You could but love, you had no choice
But love and turn again to look.
How young she was and yet how old! —
Red orange ripened in the sun

L I G H T

Where never hand had reached as yet.
The calm strength of her lifted face,
The low notes of her tuneful voice,
Were mint-marks of that wondrous race
But scarcely born nor known as yet
Beyond yon yellow hills that fret
Warm sea-winds with their waving pine.
A princess of that royal line
Of kings who came and silent passed,
Yet, passing, set bold, royal hand
And mighty mint-mark on the land,
And set it there to last and last,
As if in bronzen copper cast.

III

He, too, was born of men who wooed
The savage walks of solitude,
And hewed close, clean to nature's laws —
Of men who knew not tears or fears,
Of men full-sexed, yet men who knew
Not sex till perfect manhood was.
When men had thews of antique men,
And one stood with the strength of ten;
When men gat men who dared to do;
Gat men of heart who dwelt apart,
As Adam dwelt, when giants grew
And men as gods drew ample breath —

L I G H T

As Adams with their thousand years,
Ere drunkenness of sex had done
The silly world to willing death.

IV

What royal parentage, what true
Nobility, those men who knew
The light, who chased the yellow sun
From sea to sea triumphantly,
And westward fought and westward won,
As never daring man had done.

V

They housed with God upon the height;
Companioned with the peak, the pin
They led the red-lit firing line.
Walled 'round by room and room and room,
They read God's open book at night,
And drank His star-distilled perfume;
By day they dared the trackless west
And chased the battling sun to rest.

VI

Such sad, mad marches to the sea,
Such silent sacrifice, such trust!
Such months of marching, misery,
Such mountains heaped with heroes' dust!
Yet what stout thews the fearless few

L I G H T

Who won the sea at last, who knew
The cleansing fire and laid hold
To hammer out their house of gold!

VII

Their cities zone their sea of seas,
Their white tents top the mountain's crest.
The coward? He trenched not with these.
The weakling? He was laid to rest.
Each man stood forth a man, such men
As God wrought not since time began,
Each man a hero, lion each.
Behold what length of limb, what length
Of life, of love, what daring reach
To deep-hived honeycomb! What strength!
How clean his hands, how stout his heart
To dare, to do, camp, court or mart.
He stands so tall, so clean, he hears
The morning music of the spheres.

VIII

He loved her, feared her, far apart,
He kept his ways and dreamed his dreams;
He sang strange songs, he tuned his heart
To music of the pines that preach
Such sermons on such holy themes
As only he who climbs can reach.

L I G H T

IX

He would not selfish pluck one rose
To wear upon his breast a day
And let its perfume pass away
With any wind that comes or goes.
Why, he might walk God's garden through
Nor touch one bud nor fright one bird.
The music of the spheres he heard,
The harmony he breathed, he knew.
He never marred God's harmony
With one harsh thought. The favored few
Who cared to live above the sod
And lift glad faces up to God
He knew loved all as well as he,
Had equal right to rose or tree.

X

And he must spare all to the day
Their willing feet should pass the way
God in His garden walked at eve.
And as for weaklings who by turn
Would jest or jeer, he could but grieve,
And pity all and silent say:
"Let us lead forth, make fair the way;
By time and stress they, too, will learn
Which way to live, to love, to turn."

L I G H T

XI

The long, lean Polar bear uprose,
Outreached a paw, a bare, black nose,
As if to still hold hard control,
By glacier steep or ice-packed main,
His mighty battlemented snows.
He bared his yellow teeth in vain;
Then backed against his bleak North Pole
He sulked and shook his icy chain.
And he who dared not pluck a rose,
As if in chorus with his pine,
Must up and lead the battle line
Beyond the awesome Arctic chine.

XII

No airy sighs, no tales to tell;
He knew God is, that all is well,
That death is but a name, a date,
A milestone by the stormy road,
Where you may lay aside your load
And bow your face and rest and wait,
Defying fear, defying fate.

XIII

How fair is San Francisco Bay
When golden stars consort and when
The moon pours silver paths for men,

L I G H T

And care walks by the other way!
Huge ships, black-bellied, lay below
Broad, yellow flags from silken Chind,
Round, blood-red banners from Nippon,
Like to her sun at sudden dawn —
Brave battle-ships as white as snow,
With bannered stars tossed to the wind,
Warm as a kiss when love is kind.

XIV

'Twas twilight, such soft, twilight night
As only Californians know,
When faithful love is forth, and when
The Bay lies bathed in mellow light;
And perfumed breath and softened breeze
Blows far from Honolulu's seas —
From sundown seas in afterglow —
When Song sits at the feet of men
And pipes, low-voiced as mated dove,
For love to measure step with love.

XV

And yet, for all the perfumed seas,
The peace, the silent harmonies,
The two stood mute, estranged before
Her high-built, stately, opened door
High up the terraced, plunging hill
As hushed as death, as white and still.

L I G H T

XVI

The moon, amid her yellow fleet,
With full, white sail, moved on and on,
And drew, as loving hearts are drawn,
All seas of earth fast following,
As slow she sailed her sapphire seas.
Then, as if pausing, pitying,
She poured down at their very feet
Broad silver ways to walk upon
Which way they would, or east or west,
Which way they would, or worst or best.

XVII

Her voice was low, low leaned her head,
Her two white hands all helpless prest
As if to hush her aching breast,
As if to bid her aching heart
To silent bear its bitter part,
The while she choking, sobbing, said:
"Then here, for all our poppy days,
Here, here, the parting of the ways?"

XVIII

"Aye, so you will it. Here divide
The ways, forever and a day.
You, you — you women lead the way —
You lead where love hangs crucified,

L I G H T

Where love is laid prone in the dust —
Where cunning, cold men mouth sweet lies
And make pure love their merchandise.
You heedless lead to hollow lands
Of bloodless hearts and nerveless hands;
I will not rival such, nay, nay
Not look on such, save with disgust."

XIX

Her head sank lower still: her hair,
Her heavy hair, great skeins of gold,
Hung loosened, heedless, fold on fold,
As if she cared not, could not care;
She tried to speak but nothing said;
She could but press her aching heart,
Step back a pace and shudder, start,
The while she slowly moved her head,
As if to say; but nothing said.

XX

Her silence lit his soul with rage,
He strode before her, forth and back,
A lion strident in his cage,
Hard bound within his iron track.
And then he paused, shook back his head,
And fronting her half savage said;
"My father, yours, each Argonaut

L I G H T

An Alexander, to this sea
Came forth and conquered mightily.

XXI

“God, what great loves, what lovers when
These westmost states were born of men,
When giants gripped their hands and came
With nerves of steel and souls of flame —
Could you not wait within yon Gate,
As their loves dared to wait and wait?
An hundred thousand Didos sat
Atlantic’s sea-bank nor forgot,
The while their lovers westmost fought,
But patient sat as Dido, when
She waved Æneas back again
And bravely dared to smile thereat.

XXII

“Hear me! All Europe, rind to core,
Is rotting, crumbling, base to top.
Withhold the gold and silver prop
Our dauntless fathers hewed of yore
From yonder seamed Sierras’ core,
And such a toppling you may hear
As never fell on mortal ear.

L I G H T

XXIII

"What's London town but sorrow's town
And sins, such as I dare not name?
Such thousands creeping up and down
Its dreary streets in draggled shame!
What's London but a market pen —
Its hundred thousand lewd, rude men?
What's London but a town of stone,
Its thousand thousand women prone?

XXIV

"What's Paris but a printed screen,
A gaudy gauze that scant conceals
The sensuous nakedness between
The folds it but the more reveals?
What's Paris but a circus, fair,
To tempt this west world's open purse
With tawdry trinkets, toys bizarre?
Ah, would that she were nothing worse!
What's Paris but a piteous mart
For west-world mothers crazed to trade
Some silly, simpering, weak maid
For thread-bare, out-at-elbows rank —
To outworn, weak degenerate
Whose bank is but the faro bank,
Whose grave bounds all his real estate;

L I G H T

Whose boast, whose only stock in trade,
A duel and a ruined maid!

xxv

“What’s Berlin, Dresden, sorry Rome,
But traps that take you unaware?
Behold yon paintings, right at home,
Where nature paints with patient care
Such splendid pictures, sea and shore,
As all the world should bow before;
Such pictures hanging to the skies
Against the walls of Paradise,
From base to bastion, as should wake
Piave’s painter from the dust;
Such walls of color crowned in snow,
Such steepes, such deeps, profoundly vast,
As old-time Art had died to know,
And knowing, died content, as he
Who looked from Nimo’s steep to see,
Just once, the Promised Land, and passed!
And yet, for all yon scene, this sea,
You will not bide, Penelope?”

xxvi

“Then go, since you so will it, go!
My way lies yonder, forth and far
Beneath yon gleaming northmost star

L I G H T

O'er silent lands of trackless snow.
Lo, there leads duty, hope, as when
This westmost world demanded men:
Such men as led the firing line
When blood ran free as festal wine;
Such men as when, fast side by side,
Our fathers fought and fighting died."

XXVII

"But go — good by! Go see again
The noisy circus, since you must;
Its painted women that disgust,
Its nauseating monkey men;
But mark you, Beautiful, the moth
That loves that luring, sensuous light —
Nay, hear! I am not wilful, wroth;
I love with such exceeding might,
My beautiful, my all, my life,
I would not, could not take to wife
My lily tainted by the touch,
The breath, the very sight of such.

XXVIII

"Shall I see leprous apes lean o'er
My rose, breathe, touch it if they may,
With breath that is a very stench,
The while they bow and bend before,

L I G H T

Familiar, as with some weak wench,
And smirk in double-meaning French?

XXIX

"You shrink back angered? Well, adieu;
What, not a hand? What, not a touch? . . .
My crime is that I love too much,
My crime is that I love too true,
Love you, love you, not part of you —
Yea, how much less the rose that droops
In fevered halls where folly stoops!

XXX

"Yon splendid, triple, midnight star
Is mine; I follow fast and sure,
Because it guides so far, so far
From fevered follies that allure
Your soul, your splendid, spotless soul
To wreck where siren billows roll —
Good night! What, turn aside your face
That I might never see again
Its lifted glory and proud grace,
As some brave beacon light! Well, then, . . .
Ha, ha! Let's laugh lest one may weep —
How steep your hill seems, steep how steep!
How deep down seems the misty town,
How lone, how dark, how distant down!

L I G H T

The moon, too, turns her face, her light,
As you have turned your face to-night,
As you have turned your face from me,
My heartless, lost Penelope."

xxxI

Then sudden up she tossed her head,
And, face to his face, proudly said:
"Penelope! To wait and weave!
Penelope! To wait and wait,
As waits a dog within his gate;
To weave and unweave, grieve and grieve,
As some weak harem favorite
Tight fenced from action, life, and light!

xxxII

"Why, I should not have sat one day
To that dull-threaded, thudding loom,
With cowards crowding fast for room
To say what brave men dare not say!
Why, I had snatched down from the wall
His second sword that sad, first day
And set its edge to end it all! —
Had hewn that loom to splinters, yea,
Had slashed the warp, enmeshed the woof
And called that dog and put to proof
Each silly suitor hounding me,
Then hoisted sail and bent to sea!

XXXIII

"Penelope! Penelope!
Of all fool tales in history
I think this tale the foolishlest!
Why I, the favored of that land,
Had such fools come to seek my hand,
Had ranged in line the sexless list
And frankly answered with my fist!"

XXXIV

He passed. She paused. Each helpless hand
Fell down, fell heavy down as lead;
She tried but could not understand.
At last she raised once more her head,
Set firm her lips, stepped back a pace,
Looked long his far star in the face,
Stood stately, still, as fixed as fate,
Till all the east flushed sudden red;
Then as she turned within she said,
"I cannot, will not, will not wait."

BOOK SECOND



CANTO I

I

HIS triple star led on and on,
Led up blue, bastioned Chilkoot Pass
To clouds, through clouds, above white clouds
That droop with snows like beaded strouds —
Above a world of gleaming glass,
Where loomed such cities of the skies
As only prophets look upon,
As only loving poets see,
With prophet ken of mystery.

II

What lone, white silence, left or right,
What whiteness, something more than white!
Such steel blue whiteness, van or rear —
Such silence as you could but hear
Above the sparkled, frosted rime,

L I G H T

As if the steely stars kept time
And sang their mystic, mighty rune —
. . . And oh, the icy, eerie moon!

III

What temples, towers, tombs of white,
White tombs, white tombstones, left and right,
That pushed the passing night aside
To ward where fallen stars had died —
To ward white tombs where dead stars lay —
White tombs more white, more bright than
they;
White tombs high heaped white tombs upon —
White Ossa piled on Pelion!

IV

Pale, steel stars flashed, rose, fell again,
Then paused, leaned low, as pitying,
And leaning so they ceased to sing,
The while the moon, with mother care,
Slow rocked her silver rocking-chair.

V

Night here, mid-year, is as a span;
Thor comes, a gold-clad king of war,
Comes only as the great Thor can.
Thor storms the battlements and Thor,
Far leaping, clinging crowned upon,

L I G H T

Throws battle hammer forth and back
Until the walls blaze in his track
With sparks and it is sudden dawn —
Dawn, sudden, sparkling, as a gem —
A jeweled, frost-set diadem
Of diamond, ruby, radium.

VI

Two tallest, ice-tipt peaks take flame,
Take yellow flame, take crimson, pink,
Then, ere you yet have time to think,
Take hues that never yet had name.
Then turret, minaret, and tower,
As if to mark some mystic hour,
Or ancient, lost Masonic sign,
Take on a darkness like to night,
Deep night below the yellow light
That erstwhile seemed some snow-white tomb.
Then all is set in ghostly gloom,
As some dim-lighted, storied shrine —
As if the stars forget to stay
At court when comes the kingly day.

VII

And now the high-built shafts of brass,
Gate posts that guard the tomb-set pass,
Put off their crowns, rich robes, and all

L I G H T

Their sudden, splendid light let fall;
And tomb and minaret and tower
Again gleam as that midnight hour.
While day, as scorning still to wait,
Drives fiercely through the ice-built gate
That guards the Arctic's outer hem
Of white, high-built Jerusalem.

VIII

To see, to guess the great white throne,
Behold Alaska's ice-built steep
Where everlasting silence keeps
And white death lives and lords alone:
Go see God's river born full grown —
The gold of this stream it is good:
Here grows the Ark's white gopher wood —
A wide, white land, unnamed, unknown,
A land of mystery and moan.

IX

Tall, trim, slim gopher trees incline,
A leaning, laden, helpless copse,
And moan and creak and intertwine
Their laden, twisted, tossing tops,
And moan all night and moan all day
With winds that walk these steepes away.

L I G H T

X

The melancholy mōose looks down,
A tattered Capuchin in brown,
A gaunt, ungainly, mateless monk,
An elephant without his trunk,
While far, against the gleaming blue,
High up a rock-topt ridge of snow,
Where scarce a dream would care to go,
Climb countless blue-clad caribou,
In endless line till lost to view.

XI

The rent ice surges, grinds, and groans,
Then gorges, backs, and climbs the shore,
Then breaks with sudden rage and roar
And plunging, leaping, foams and moans
Swift down the surging, seething stream —
Mad hurdles of some monstrous dream.

XII

To see God's river born full grown,
To see him burst the womb of earth
And leap, a giant at his birth,
Through shoreless whiteness, with wild shout —
A shout so sharp, so cold, so dread
You see, feel, hear, his sheeted dead —
'Tis as to know, no longer doubt,

L I G H T

'Tis as to know the eld Unknown,
Aye, bow before the great white throne.

XIII

White-hooded nuns, steeps gleaming white,
Lean o'er his cradle, left and right,
And weep the while he moans and cries
And rends the earth with agonies;
High ice-heaved summits where no thing
Has yet set foot or flashed a wing —
Bare ice-built summits where the white
Wide world is but a sea of white —
White kneeling nuns that kneel and feed
The groaning ice god in his greed,
And feed, forever feed, man's soul.
The full-grown river bounds right on
From out his birthplace tow'rd the Pole;
He knows no limit, no control:
He scarce is here till he is gone —
This sudden, mad, ice-born Yukon.

XIV

Beyond white plunging Chilkoot Pass,
That trackless Pass of stately tombs,
Of midday glories, midnight glooms,
Of morn's great gate posts, girt in brass —
This courtier, born to nature's court,
This comrade, peer of peaks, still kept

L I G H T

Companion with the stars and leapt
And laughed, the gliding sea of glass
Beneath his feet in merry sport.

XV

Then mute red men, the quick canoe,
Then o'er the ice-born surge and on,
Till gleaming snows and steeps were gone,
Till wide, deep waters, swirling, blue,
Received the sudden, swift canoe,
That leapt and laughed and laughing flew.

XVI

Then tall, lean trees, girth scarce a span,
With moss-set, moss-hung banks of gold
Most rich in hue, more gorgeous than
Silk carpetings of Turkestan:
Deep yellow mosses, rich as gold,
More gorgeous than the eye of man
Hath seen save in this wonderland —
Then flashing, tumbling, headlong waves
Below white, ice-bound, ice-built shores —
The river swept a seam of white
Where basalt bluffs made day like night.
And then they heard no sound, the oars
Were idle, still as grassy graves.

L I G H T

XVII

And then the mad, tumultuous moon
Spilt silver seas to plunge upon,
Possessed the land, a sea of white.
That white moon rivaled the red dawn
And slew the very name of night,
And walked the grave of afternoon —
That vast, vehement, stark mad moon!

XVIII

The wide, still waters, sedgy shore,
A lank, brown wolf, a hungry howl,
A lean and hungry midday moon;
And then again the red man's oar —
A wide-winged, mute, white Arctic owl,
A black, red-crested, screeching loon
That knew not night from middle noon,
Nor gold-robed sun from lean, lank moon —
That crazy, black, red-crested loon.

XIX

Swift narrows now, and now and then
A broken boat with drowning men;
The wide, still marshes, dank as death,
Where honked the wild goose long and loud
With unabated, angry breath.
Black swallows twittered in a cloud

L I G H T

Above the broad mosquito marsh,
The wild goose honked, forlorn and harsh;
Honked, fluttered, flew in warlike mood
Above her startled, myriad brood,
The while the melancholy moose,
As if to mock the honking goose,
Forsook his wall, plunged in the wave
And sank, as sinking in a grave,
Sank to his eyes, his great, sad eyes,
And watched, in wonder, mute surprise,
Watched broken barge and drowning men
Drift, swirl, then plunge the gorge again.

xx

Again that great white Arctic owl,
As pitying, it perched the bank
Where swirled a barge and swirling sank —
A drowned man swirling with white face
Low lifting from the swift whirlpool.
That distant, doleful, hilltop howl —
That screaming, crimson-crested fool!
And oh, that eerie, ice-made moon
That hung the cobalt tent of blue
And looked straight down, to look you through,
That dead man swirling in his place,
That honking, honking, huge gray goose,
That solitary, sad-eyed moose,

L I G H T

That owl, that wolf, that human loon,
And oh, that death's head, hideous moon!

XXI

And this the Yukon, night by night,
The yellow Yukon, day by day;
A land of death, vast, voiceless, white,
A graveyard locked in ice-set clay,
A graveyard to the Judgment Day.

XXII

On, on, the swirling pool was gone,
On, on, the boat swept on, swept on,
That moon was as a thousand moons!
Two dead men swirled, one swept, one sank —
Two wolves, two owls, two yelling loons!
And now three loons! How many moons?
How many white owls perch the shore?
Three lank, black wolves along the bank
That watch the drowned men swirl or sink!
Three screeching loons along the brink —
That moon disputing with the dawn
That dared the yellow, dread Yukon!

XXIII

And why so like some lorn graveyard
Where only owls and loons may say
And life goes by the other way?

L I G H T

Aye, why so hideous and so hard,
So deathly hard to look upon?
Because this cold, wild, dread Yukon,
Of gold-sown banks, of sea white waves,
Is but one land, one sea of graves.

XXIV

Behold where bones hang either bank!
Great tusks of beasts before the flood
That floated here and floating sank —
'Mid ice-locked walls and ice-hung steep,
With muck and stone and moss and mud,
Where only death and darkness keep!
Lo, this is death-land! Heap on heap,
By ice-strown strand or rock-built steep,
By moss-brown walls, gray, green or blue,
The Yukon cleaves a graveyard through!
Three thousand miles of tusk and bone,
Strown here, strown there, all heedless strown,
All strown and sown just as they lay
That time the fearful deluge passed,
Safe locked in ices to the last,
Safe locked, as records laid away,
To wait, to wait, the Judgment Day.

XXV

He landed, pierced the ice-locked earth,
He burned it to the very bone —

L I G H T

Burned and laid bare the deep bedstone
Placed at the building, at the birth
Of morn, and here, there, everywhere,
Such bones of bison, mastodon!
Such tusky monsters without name!
Great ice-bound bones with flesh scarce gone,
So fresh the wild dogs nightly came
To fight about and feast upon.
And gold along the bedrock lay
So bounteous below the bones
Men barely need to turn the stones
To fill their skins, within the day,
With rich, red gold and go their way.

XXVI

“The gold of that place it is good.”
Lo, here God laid the Paradise!
Lo, here each witness of the flood,
Tight jailed in ice eternal, lies
To wait the bailiff’s chorus call:
“Come into court, come one, come all!”
But why so cold, so deathly cold
The battered beasts, the scattered gold,
The pleasant trees of Paradise,
Deep locked in everlasting ice?

XXVII

Oyez! the red man's simple tale;
He says that once, o'er hill and vale,
Ripe fruits hung ready all the year;
That man knew neither frost nor fear,
That bison wallowed to the eyes
In grass, that palm trees brushed the skies
Where birds made music all day long.
That then a great chief shaped a spear
Bone-tipt and sharp and long and strong,
And made a deadly moon-shaped bow,
And then a flint-tipt arrow wrought.
Then cunning, snake like, creeping low,
As creeps a cruel cat, he sought
And in sheer wantonness he shot
A large-eyed, trusting, silly roe.
And then, exultant, crazed, he slew
Ten bison, ten tame bear and, too,
A harmless, long-limbed, shambling moose;
That then the smell of blood let loose
The passions of all men and all
Uprose and slew, or great or small —
Uprose and slew till hot midday
All four-foot creatures in their way;
Then proud, defiant, every one,
Shook his red spear-point at the sun.

L I G H T

XXVIII

Then God said, through a mist of tears,
"What would ye, braves made mad with blood?"
And then they shook their bone-tipt spears
And cried, "The sun it is not good!
Too hot the sun, too long the day;
Break off and throw the end away!"

XXIX

Then God, most angered instantly,
Drew down the day from out the sky
And brake the day across his knee
And hurled the fragments hot and high
And far down till they fell upon
The bronzing waves of dread Yukon,
Nor spared the red men one dim ray
Of light to lead them on their way.

XXX

And then the red men filled the lands
With wailing for just one faint ray
Of light to guide them home that they
Might wash and cleanse their blood-red hands.

XXXI

But God said, "Yonder, far away
Down yon Yukon, your broken day!

L I G H T

Go gather it from out the night!
That fitful, fearful Northern Light,
Is all that ye shall ever know
To guide henceforth the way you go.

XXXII

"You shall not see my face again,
But you shall see cold death instead.
This land hath sinned, this land is dead;
You drenched your beauteous land in blood,
And now behold the wild, white rain
Shall fall until a drowning flood
Shall fill all things above, below,
To wash away the smell of blood,
And birds shall die and beasts be dumb,
When cold, the cold of death shall come
And weave a piteous shroud of snow,
In graveyard silence, ever so."

XXXIII

The red men say that then the rain
Drowned all the fires of the world,
Then drowned the fires of the moon:
That then the sun came not again,
Save in the middle summer noon,
When hot, red lances they had hurled
Are hurled at them like fiery rain,
Till Yukon rages like a main.

L I G H T

XXXIV

With bated breath these skin-clad men
Tell why the big-nosed moose foreknew
The flood; how, bandy-legged, he flew
Far up high Saint Elias: how,
Down in the slope of his left horn,
The raven rested, night and morn;
How, in the hollow of his right,
The dove-hued moose-bird nestled low
Until they touched the utmost height;
How dove and raven soon took flight
And winged them forth and far away;
But how the moose did stay and stay,
His great sad eyes all wet with tears,
And keep his steeps two thousand years.

XXXV

He heard the half nude red men say,
Close huddled to the flame at night,
How in the hollow of a palm
A woman and a water rat,
That dreadful, darkened, drowning day,
Crept close and nestled in their fright;
And how a bear, tame as a lamb,
Came to them in the tree and sat
The long, long drift-time to the sea,
The while the wooing water rat

L I G H T

Made love to her incessantly;
How then the bear became a priest
And married them at last; how then
To them was born the shortest, least
Of all the children of all men,
And yet most cunning and most brave
Of all who dare the bleak north wave.

xxxvi

What tales of tropic fruit! No tale
But of some soft, sweet, sensuous clime,
Of love and lovely maiden's trust —
Some peopled, pleasant, palm-hung vale
Of everlasting summer time —
And, then the deadly sin of lust;
Forbidden fruit, shame and disgust!

xxxvii

And whence the story of it all,
The palm land, love land and the fall?
Was't born of ages of desire
From such sad children of the snows
For something fairer, better, higher?
God knows, God knows, God only knows.
But I should say, hand laid to heart
And head made bare, as I would swear,
These piteous, sad-faced children there

L I G H T

Knew Eden, the expulsion, knew
The deluge, knew the deluge true!

XXXVIII

And what though this be surely so?
Just this: I know, as all men know,
As few before this surely knew —
Just this, and count it great or small,
The best of you or worst of you,
The Bible, lid to lid, is true!

CANTO II

I

THE year waxed weary, gouty, old;
The crisp days dwindled to a span,
The dying year it fell as cold
As dead feet of a dying man.
The hard, long, weary work was done,
The dark, deep pits probed to the bone,
And each had just one tale to tell.
Ten thousand argonauts as one,
Agnostic, Christian, infidel,
All said, despite of creed or class,
All said as one, "As surely as
The Bible is, the deluge was,
Whate'er the curse, whate'er the cause!"

L I G H T

II

What merry men these miners were,
And mighty in their pent-up force!
They wrought for her, they fought for her,
For her alone, or night or day,
In tent or camp, their one discourse
The Love three thousand miles away,
The Love who waked to watch and pray.

III

Yet rude were they and brutal they,
Their love a blended love and lust,
Born of this later, loveless day;
You could but love them for their truth,
Their frankness and their fiery youth,
And yet turn from them in disgust,
To loathe, to pity, and mistrust.

IV

The Siege of Troy knew scarce such men,
Such hardy, daring men as they,
The coward had not voyaged then,
The weak had died upon the way.

V

They sang, they sang some like to this,
"I say risk all for one warm kiss;

L I G H T

I say 'twere better risk the fall,
Like Romeo, to venture all
And boldly climb to deadly bliss."

VI

I like that savage, Sabine way;
What mighty minstrels came of it!
Their songs are ringing to this day,
The bravest ever sung or writ;
Their loves the love of Juliet,
Of Portia, Desdemona, yea,
The old true loves are living yet;
And we, we love, we weep, we sigh,
In love with loves that will not die.

VII

Then take her, lover, sword in hand,
Hot-blooded and red-handed, clasp
Her sudden, stormy, tall and grand,
And lift her in your iron grasp
And kiss her, kiss her till she cries
From keen, sweet, happy, killing pain.
Aye, kiss her till she seeming dies;
Aye, kiss her till she dies, and then,
Why kiss her back to life again!

L I G H T

VIII

I love all things that truly love,
I love the low-voiced cooing dove
In wooing time, he woos so true,
His soft notes fall so overfull
Of love they thrill me through and through.
But when the thunder-throated bull
Upheaves his head and shakes the air
With eloquence and battle's blare,
And roars and tears the earth to woo,
I like his warlike wooing too.

IX

Yet best to love that lover is
Who loves all things beneath the sun,
Then finds all fair things in just one,
And finds all fortune in one kiss.

X

How wisely born, how more than wise,
How wisely learned must be that soul
Who loves all earth, all Paradise,
All people, places, pole to pole,
Yet in one kiss includes the whole!

XI

Give me a lover ever bold,
A lover clean, keen, sword in hand,

L I G H T

Like to those white-plumed knights of old
Whose loves held honor in the land;
Those men with hot blood in their veins
And hot, swift, iron hand to kill —
Those women loving well the chains
That bound them fast against their will;
Yet loved and lived — are living still.

XII

Enough: the bronzed man launched his boat,
A faithful dwarf clutched at the oar,
And Boreas began to roar
As if to break his burly throat.

XIII

Down, down by basalt palisade,
Down, down by bleakest ice-piled isle!
The mute, dwarf water rat afraid?
The water rat it could but smile
To hear the cold, wild waters roar
Against his savage Arctic shore.

XIV

But now he listened, gave a shout,
A startled cry, akin to fear.
The hand of God had reached swift out
And locked, as in an iron vise,
The whole white world in blue-black ice,

L I G H T

And daylight scarce seemed living more.
The day, the year, the world, lay dead.
With star-tipt candles foot and head;
Great stars, that burn a whole half year,
Stood forth, five-horned, and near, so near!

xv

The ghost-white day scarce drew a breath,
The dying day shrank to a span;
There was no life save that of man
And woolly dogs — man, dogs, and death!
The sun, a mass of molten gold,
Surged feebly up, then sudden rolled
Right back as in a beaten track
And left the white world to the moon
And five-horned stars of gleaming gold;
Such stars as sang in silent rune —
And oh, the cold, such killing cold
As few have felt and none have told!

xvi

And now he knew the last dim light
Lay on yon ice-shaft, steep and far,
Where stood one bold, triumphant star,
And he would dare the gleaming height,
Would see the death-bed of the day,
Whatever fate might make of it.
A foolish thing, yet were it fit

L I G H T

That he who dared to love, to say,
To live, should look the last of Light
Full in the face, then go his way
All silent into lasting night
As he had left her, on her height?

XVII

He climbed, he climbed, he neared at last
The Golden Fleece of flitting Light!
When sudden as an eagle's flight —
An eagle frightened from its nest
That crowns the topmost, rock-reared crest —
It swooped, it drooped, it, dying, passed.

XVIII

As when some sunny, poppy day
The Mariposa scatters gold
The while he takes his happy flight,
Like star dust when the day is old,
So passed his Light and all was night.

XIX

Some star-like scattered flecks of gold
Flashed from the far and fading wings
That kept the sky, like living things —
Then oh, the cold, the cruel cold!
The light, the life of him had past,

L I G H T

The spirit of the day had fled;
The lover of God's first-born, Light,
Descended, mourning for his dead.
The last of light, the very last
He deemed that he should look upon
Until God's everlasting dawn
Beyond this dread half year of night
Had fled forever from his sight.

xx

'Twas death to go, thrice death to stay.
Turn back, go southward, seek the sun?
Yea, better die in search of light,
Die boldly, face set forth for day,
As many dauntless men have done,
Than wail at fate and house with night.

xxi

Some woolly dogs, a low, dwarf-chief —
His trained thews stood him now in stead —
Broad snow-shoes, skins, a laden sled. —
That moon was as a brazen thief
That dares to mock, laugh, and carouse!
It followed, followed everywhere;
He hid his face, that moon was there.
Such painful light, such piteous pain!
It broke into his very brain,
As breaks a burglar in a house.

L I G H T

XXII

Scarce seen, a change came, slow, so slow!
That moon sank slowly out of sight,
The lower world of gleaming white
Took on a somber band of woe,
A wall of umber 'round about,
So dim at first you could but doubt,
That change there was, day after day —
Nay, nay, not day, I can but say
Sleep after sleep, sleep after sleep —
That band grew darker, deep, more deep,
Until there girt a dense dark wall,
A low, black wall of ebon hue,
Oppressive, deathlike as a pall;
It walked with you, close compassed you,
While not one thread of light shot through.
Above the black a gird of brown
Soft blending into amber hue,
And then from out the cobalt blue
Great, massive, golden stars swung down
Like tow'rd lights of mountain town.

XXIII

At last the moon moved gaunt and slow,
Half veiled her hollow, hungry face
In amber, kept unsteady pace

L I G H T

High up her star-set wall of snow,
Nor scarcely deigned to look below.

XXIV

Then far beyond, above the night,
Above the umber, amber hue,
Above the lean moon's blare and blight,
One mighty ice shaft shimmered through;
One gleaming peak, as white, as lone
As you could think the great white throne
Stood up against the cobalt blue,
And kept companion with the stars
Despite dusk walls or umber bars.

XXV

That wall, that hideous prison wall,
That blackness, umber, amber hue,
It cumbers you, encircles you,
It mantles as a hearse's pall.
Your eyes lift to the star-pricked sky,
You lift your frosted face, you pray
That e'en the sickly moon might stay
A time, if but to see you die.
Yet how it blinds you, body, soul!
You can no longer keep control.
Your feebled senses fall astray:
You cannot think, you dare not say.

L I G H T

XXVI

And now such under gleam of light,
Such blazing, flaming, frightful glare;
Such sudden, deadly, lightning gleam,
Some like a monstrous, mad nightmare —
Such hideous light, born of such night!
It burst, with changeful interval,
From out the ice beneath the wall,
From out the groaning, surging stream
That breathed, or tried to breathe, in vain,
That struggled, strangled, shrieked with pain!
'Twas as if he of Patmos read,
Sat by with burning pen and said,
With piteous and prophetic voice,
"The earth shall pass with rustling noise."

XXVII

Swift out the ice-crack, fiery red,
Swift up the umber wall and back,
Then 'round and 'round, up, down and back,
The sudden lightning sped and sped,
Until the walls hung burnished red,
An instant red, then yellow, white,
With something more than earthly light.

L I G H T

XXVIII

It blinds your eyes until they burn,
Until you dare not look or turn,
But think of him who saw and told
The story of, the glory of,
The jasper walls, the streets of gold,
Where trails God's unseen garments' hem
The holy New Jerusalem.

XXIX

Then while he trudged he tried to think —
And then another sudden light,
Or red or yellow, blue or white,
Burst up from out the very brink
Of where he passed and, left or right,
It burnished yet again the walls!
Then up, straight up against the stars
That seemed as jostled, rent with jars!
Then silent night. Where next and when?
Then blank, black interval, and then —
And oh, those blank, dread intervals,
This writing on the umber walls!

XXX

The blazing Borealis passed,
The umber walls fell down at last
And left the great cathedral stars,—

L I G H T

The five-horned stars, blent, burnished bars
Of gold, red, gleaming, blinding gold —
And still the cold, the killing cold!

XXXI

The moon resumed all heaven now,
She shepherded the stars below
Along her wide, white steeps of snow,
Nor stooped nor rested, where or how.
She bared her full white breast, she dared
The sun e'er show his face again.
She seemed to know no change, she kept
Carousal constantly, nor slept,
Nor turned aside a breath, nor spared
The fearful meaning, the mad pain,
The weary eyes, the poor, dazed brain
That came at last to feel, to see
The dread, dead touch of lunacy.

XXXII

How loud the silence! Oh, how loud!
How more than beautiful the shroud
Of dead Light in the moon-mad north
When great torch-tipping stars stand forth
Above the black, slow-moving pall
As at some fearful funeral!

L I G H T

XXXIII

The moon blares as mad trumpets blare
To marshaled warriors long and loud:
The cobalt blue knows not a cloud,
But oh, beware that moon, beware
Her ghostly, graveyard, moon-mad stare!

XXXIV

Beware white silence more than white!
Beware the five-horned starry rune;
Beware the groaning gorge below;
Beware the wide, white world of snow,
Where trees hang white as hooded nun —
No thing not white, not one, not one,
But most beware that mad white moon.

XXXV

All day, all day, all night, all night —
Nay, nay, not yet or night or day.
Just whiteness, whiteness, ghastly white
Made doubly white by that mad moon
And strange stars jangled out of tune!

XXXVI

At last he saw, or seemed to see,
Above, beyond, another world.
Far up the ice-hung path there curled

L I G H T

The five-horned stars, blent, burnished bars
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Far up the ice-hung path there curled

L I G H T

A red-veined cloud, a canopy
That topt the fearful ice-built peak
That seemed to prop the very porch
Of God's house; then, as if a torch
Burned fierce, there flashed a fiery streak,
A flush, a blush on heaven's cheek!

xxxvii

The dogs sat down, men sat the sled
And watched the flush, the blush of red.
The little woolly dogs they knew,
Yet scarce knew what they were about.
They thrust their noses up and out,
They drank the Light, what else to do?
Their little feet, so worn, so true,
Could scarce keep quiet for delight.
They knew, they knew, how much they knew,
The mighty breaking up of night!
Their bright eyes sparkled with such joy
That they at last should see loved Light!
The tandem sudden broke all rule,
Swung back, each leaping like a boy
Let loose from some dark, ugly school —
Leaped up and tried to lick his hand —
Stood up as happy children stand.

L I G H T

XXXVIII

How tenderly God's finger set
His crimson flower on that height
Above the battered walls of night!
A little space it flourished yet,
And then His angel, His first-born,
Burst through, as on that primal morn!

XXXIX

His right hand held a sword of flame,
His left hand javelins of light,
And swift down, down, right down he came!
His bright wings wide as the wide sky,
And right and left, and hip and thigh,
He smote the marshaled hosts of night
With all his majesty and might.

XL

The scared moon paled and she forgot
Her pomp and pride and turned to fly.
The ice-heaved palisades, the high
Heaved peaks that propped God's house, the stars
That flamed above the prison bars,
As battle stars with fury fraught,
Were burned to ruin and were not.

L I G H T

XLI

Then glad earth shook her raiment wide,
And free and far, and stood up tall,
As some proud woman, satisfied,
Forgets, and yet remembers all.
She stood exultant, till her form,
A queen above some battle storm,
Blazed with the glory, the delight
Of battle with the hosts of night.
And night was broken. Light at last
Lay on the Yukon. Night had passed.

CANTO III

I

THE days grew longer, stronger, yet
The strong man grew then as a child.
Too hard the tension and too wild
The terror; he could not forget.
And now at last when Light was, now
He could not see nor lift his eyes,
Nor lift a hand in any wise.
It was as when a race is won
By some strong favorite athlete,
Then sinks down dying at your feet.

L I G H T

II

The red chief led him on and on
To his high lodge by gorged Yukon
And housed him kindly as his own,
Blind, broken, dazed, and so alone!

III

The low bark lodge was desolate,
And deathly cold by night, by day.
Poor, hungered children of the snows,
They heaped the fire as he froze,
Did all they could, yet what could they
But pity his most piteous fate
And pitying, silent, watch and wait?

IV

His face was ever to the wall
Or buried in his skins; the light —
He could not bear the light of day
Nor bear the heaped-up flame at night —
Not bear one touch of light at all.
There are no pains, no sharp death throes,
So dread as blindness of the snows.

V

He thought of home, he thought of her,
Thought most of her, and pictured how

L I G H T

She walked in springtime splendor where
Warm sea winds twined her heavy hair
In great Greek braids piled fold on fold,
Or loosely blown, as poppy's gold.

VI

And then he thought of her afar
Mid follies, and his soul at war
With self, self will, and iron fate
Grew as a blackened thing of hate!
And then he prayed forgiveness, prayed
As one in sin and sore afraid.

VII

And praying so he dreamed, he dreamed
She sat there looking in his face,
Sat silent by in that dread place,
Sat silent weeping, so it seemed,
Sat still, sat weeping silently.
He saw her tears and yet he knew,
The blind man knew he could not see,
Scarce hope to see for years and years.
And then he seemed to hear her tears,
To hear them steal her loose hair through
And gently fall, as falls the dew
And still, small rain of summer morn,
That makes for harvests, yellow corn.

L I G H T

VIII

He raised his hand, he touched her hair;
He did not start, he did not say;
It seemed that she was surely there;
He only questioned would she stay.
How glad he was! Why, now, what care
For hunger, blindness, blinding pain,
Could he but touch her hair again?

IX

He heard her rise, give quick command
To patient, skin-clad, savage man
To heap the wood, come, go, and then
Go feed their woolly friends at hand,
To bring fresh stores, still heap fresh flame,
Then go, then come, as morning came.

X

All seemed so real! He dared not stir,
Lest he might break this dream of her.
How holy, holy sweet her voice,
Like benediction o'er the dead!
So glad he was, so grateful he,
And thanking God most fervently,
Forgot his plight, forgot his pain,
And deep at heart did he rejoice;

L I G H T

Yet prayed he might not wake again
To peril, blindness, piteous pain,

XI

Then, as he hid his face, she came
And leaned quite near and took his hand.
'Twas cold, 'twas very cold, 'twas thin
And bony, black, just skin and bone,
Just bone and wrinkled mummy-skin.
She held it out against the flame,
Then pressed it with her two warm hands.
It seemed as she could feel the sands
Of life slow sift to shadow land.
Close on his hurt eyes she laid hand,
The while she, wearied, nodded, slept.
The flame burned low, the wind's wild moan
Awakened her. Cold as a stone
His starved form, shrunken to a shade,
Stretched in the darkness, and, dismayed,
She put the robes back and she crept
Close down beside and softly laid
Her warm, strong form to his and slept,
The while her dusk men vigil kept.

XII

That long, long night, that needed rest!
Then flames at morn; her precious store

L I G H T

Heaped hard by on the earthen floor
While mute brown men, starved men, stood by
To wait the slightest breath or sigh
Or sign of wakening request —
What silence, patience, trust! What rest!
Of all good things, I say the best
Beneath God's sun is rest, and — rest.

XIII

She slowly wakened from her sleep
To find him sleeping, silent, deep!
What food for all, what feast for all,
To chief or slave, or great or small,
Ranged round the flaming, glowing heap —
Such lank, lean flank, such hungry zest!
Such reach of limb, such rest, such rest!

XIV

Why, he had gone, had gladly gone
In quest of his eternal Light,
Beyond all dolours, that dread night,
Had she not reached her hand and drawn,
Hard drawn him back and held him so,
Held him so hard he could not go.
And yet he lingered by the brink,
As dulled and dazed as you can think —
Long, long he lingered, helpless lay,
A babe, a broken pot of clay.

L I G H T

XV

She made a broader couch, she sat
All day beside and held his hand
Lest he might sudden slip away.
And she all night beside him lay,
Lest these last grains of sinking sand
Might in the still night slip and pass,
With none at hand to turn the glass.

XVI

And did the red men prate thereat?
Why, they had laid them down and died
For her, those simple dusky sons
Of nature, children of the snows,
Born where the ice-bound river runs,
Born where the Arctic torrent flows.
Look you for evil? Look for ill
Or good, you find just what you will.

XVII

He spake no more than babe might speak:
His eyes were as the kitten's eyes
That open slowly with surprise
Then close as if to sleep a week;
But still he held, as if he knew,
The warm, strong hand, the healthful hand,
The dauntless, daring hand and true,

L I G H T

Nor, while he waked, would his unfold,
But held, as drowning man might hold
Who hopes no more of life or land,
But, as from habit, clutches hand.

XVIII

Once, as she thought he surely slept,
She slowly drew herself aside,
He thrust his hand as terrified,
Caught back her hand, kissed it and wept.
Then she, too, wept, wept tears like rain,
Her first warm, welcome happy tears,
Drew in her breath, put by her fears
And knew she had not dared in vain.

XIX

Yet day by day, hard on the brink
He hung with half-averted head,
As silent, listless, as the dead,
As sad to see as you can think.
Their lorn lodge sat the terraced steep
Above the wide, wild, groaning stream
That, like some monster in a dream,
Cried out in broken, breathless sleep;
And looking down, night after night,
She saw leap forth that sword of Light.

L I G H T

XX

She guessed, she knew the flaming sword
That turned which way to watch and ward
And guard the wall and ever guard
The Tree of Life, as it is writ.
The hand, the hilt, she could not see,
Nor yet the true, life-giving tree,
Nor cherubim that cherished it,
But yet she saw the flaming sword,
As written in the Book, the Word.

XXI

She held his hand, he did not stir,
And as she nightly sat and sat,
She silent gazed and guessed thereat.
His fancies seemed to come to her;
She could not see the Tree of Life,
How fair it grew or where it grew,
But this she knew and surely knew,
That gleaming sword meant holy strife
To keep and guard the Tree of Life.

XXII

Oh, flaming sword, rest not nor rust!
The Tree of Life is hewn and torn,
The Tree of Life is bowed and worn,
The Tree of Life is in the dust.

L I G H T

Hew brute man down, hew branch and root,
Till he may spare the Tree of Life,
The pale, the piteous woman, wife —
Till he shall learn, as learn he must,
To lift her fair face from the dust.

XXIII

She watched the wabbly moose at morn
Climb steeply up the further steep,
Huge, solitary and forlorn.
She saw him climb, turn, look and keep
Scared watch, this wild, ungainly beast,
This mateless, lost thing and the last
That roamed before and since the flood —
That climbed and climbed the topmost hill
As if he heard the deluge still.

XXIV

The sparse, brown children of the snow
Began to stir, as sap is stirred
In springtime by the song of bird,
And trudge by, wearily and slow,
Beneath their load of dappled skins
That weighed them down as weighty sins.

XXV

And oft they paused, turned and looked back
Along their desolate white track,

L I G H T

With arched hand raised to shield their eyes —
Looked back as if for something lost
Or left behind, of precious cost,
Sad-eyed and silent, mutely wise,
As just expelled from Paradise.

XXVI

How sad their dark, fixed faces seemed,
As if of long-remembered sins!
They listless moved, as if they dreamed,
As if they knew not where to go
In all their wide, white world of snow.
She could but think upon the day
God made them garments from the skins
Of beasts, then turned and bade them go,
Go forth as willed they, to and fro.

XXVII

Between the cloud-capt walls of snow
A wide-winged raven, croaking low,
Passed and repassed, each weary day,
And would not rest, not go, not stay,
But ever, ever to and fro,
As when forth from the ark of old;
And ever as he passed, each day
Let fall one croak, so cold, so cold
It seemed to strike the ice below

L I G H T

And break in fragments hard as fate;
It fell so cold, so desolate.

XXVIII

At last the sun hung hot and high,
Hung where that heartless moon had hung.
A dove-hued moose bird sudden sung
And had glad answerings hard by;
The icy steeps began to pour
Mad tumult down the rock-built steep.
The great Yukon began to roar,
As if with pain in broken sleep.
The breaking ice began to groan,
The very mountains seemed to moan.

XXIX

Then, bursting like a cannon's boom,
The great stream broke its icy bands,
And rushed and ran with outstretched hands
That laid hard hold the willow lands,
Rent wide the somber, gopher gloom
And roared for room, for room, for room!

XXX

The stalwart moose climbed hard his steep,
Climbed till he wallowed, brisket deep,
In soft'ning, sinking steeps of snow,
Then raging, turned to look below.

L I G H T

XXXI

He tossed, shook high his antlered head,
Blew blast on blast through his huge nose,
Then, wild with savage rage and fright,
He climbed, climbed to the highest height,
As if he felt the flood once more
Had come to swallow sea and shore.

XXXII

The waters sank, the man uprose,
A boat of skins, his Eskimo,
Then down from out the world of snow
They passed to seas of calm repose
Where wide sails waited, warm sea wind,
For mango isles and tamarind.

BOOK THIRD



CANTO I

I

OF all fair trees to look upon,
Of all trees "pleasant to the sight,"
Give me the Poet's tree of white —
Pink cherry trees of blest Nippon
With lovers passing to and fro —
Pink cherry lanes of Tokio;
Ten thousand cherry trees and each
Hung white with Poet's plaint and speech.

II

Of all fair lands to look upon,
To feel, to breathe, at Orient dawn,
I count this baby land the best,
Because here all things rest and rest
And all men love all things most fair
And beautiful and rich and rare;

L I G H T

And women are as cherry trees
With treasures laden, brown with bees.

III

Of all loved lands to look upon,
Give me this love land of Nippon,
Its bright, brave men, its maids at prayer,
Its peace, its carelessness of care.

IV

A mobile sea of silver mist
Sweeps up for morn to mount upon:
Then yellow, saffron, amethyst —
Such changeful hues has blest Nippon!
See but this sunrise, then forget
All scenes, all suns, all lands save one,
Just matin sun and vesper sun;
This land of inland seas of light;
This land that hardly recks of night.

V

The vesper sun of blest Nippon
Sinks crimson in the Yellow Sea:
The purple butterfly is gone,
The rainbow bird housed in his tree —
Hushed, as the last loved, trembling note
Still thrills his tuneful Orient throat —

L I G H T

Hushed, as the harper's weary hand
Waits morn to waken and command.

VI

Fast homeward bound, brown, busy feet
In wooden shoon clang up the street;
But not through all the thousand year
In Buddha's temple may you hear
One step, see hue of sun or sea,
Though wait you through eternity:
All is so still, so soft, subdued —
The very walls are hueless hued.

VII

Behold brown, kneeling penitents!
What perfumed place of silent prayer!
Burned Senko-ho, sweet frankincense!
And hear what silence everywhere!
Pale, pensive priests pass here and there
And silent lisp with bended head
The Golden Rule on scrolls of gold
As gentle, ancient Buddhists read
These precepts sacred unto them,
And watched the world grow old, so old,
Ere yet the Babe of Bethlehem.

L I G H T

VIII

How leaps the altar's forky flame!
How dreamful, dense, the sweet incense,
As pale priests burn, in Buddha's name,
Red-written sins of penitents —
Mute penitents with bended head
And unsaid sins writ deep in red.

IX

Now slow a priest with staff and scroll,
Barefoot, as mendicant, and old —
You sudden start, you lift your head,
You hear and yet you do not hear,
A sound, a song, so sweet, so dear
It well might waken yonder dead.
His staff has touched the sacred bowl
Of copper, silver, shot with gold
And wrought so magic-like of old
That all sweet sounds, or east or west,
Sought this still hollow where to rest.
Hear, hear the voice of Buddha's bell,
Bonsho-no-oto! All is well!

X

And you, you, lean, lean low to hear:
You doubt your ears, you doubt your eyes,
Your hand is lifted to your ear,

L I G H T

You fear, how cruelly you fear
The melody may die — it dies —
Dies as the swan dies, as the sun
Dies, bathed in dewy benison.

XI

It lives again; you breathe again!
What cadences that speak, that stir,
Take form and presence, as of her
Whom first you loved, ere yet of men.
It utters essence as a sound;
As Santalum sends from the ground
For devotee and worshipper
Where saints lie buried, balm and myrrh.

XII

But now so low, so faint, so low
You lean to hear yet hardly hear.
Again your hand is to your ear,
Your lips are parted, leaning so,
And now again you catch your breath!
Such breath as when you lie becalmed
At sea, and sudden start to feel
A cooling wave and quickened keel
And see your tall sail court the shore.
You hear, you more than hear, you feel,
As when the white wave shimmereth.

L I G H T

Your love is at your side once more,
An essence of some song embalmed,
Long hidden in the house of death —
You breathe it, as your Lady's breath!

XIII

Now low, so low, so soft, so still,
As when a single leaf is stirred,
As when some doubtful matin bird
Dreams russet morning decks his hill —
Then nearer, clearer, lilts each note
And longer, stronger, swells each wave —
Ten thousand dead have burst the grave,
An angel's song in every throat!
The forky flame turns and returns
To burn and burn red sins away;
Such incense on the altar burns
As some may breathe but none may say,
Though cherished to their dying day.

XIV

And now the sandaled pilgrims fall
With faces to the jeweled floor —
The incense darkens as a pall,
As clouds that darken more and more.
You dare not lift your bended head —
The silence is as if the dead

L I G H T

Alone had passed the temple door.
And now the Bonsho notes, the song!
So stronger now, so strong, so strong!

XV

The black smokes of the ashen urn
Where brown priests burn red sins away
Begin to stir, to start, to turn,
To seek the huge, bossed copper door —
As evil things that dare not stay.
The while the rich notes roll and roar
To drive dread, burned sin out before
Calm Dia-busta, the adored,
As cherubim with flaming sword.

XVI

And far, so far, such rich notes roll
That barefoot fishers far at sea
Fall prone and pray all silently
For wife and babes that wait the strand,
The tugging net clutched tight in hand,
The while they bow a space to pray;
For every asking, eager soul
Knows well the time and patiently
It lists, an hundred Ri away.

L I G H T

XVII

The thousand pilgrims girt in straw
That press Fajame's holy peak,
Prone, fasting, penitent and meek,
Hear notes as from the stars and pray,
As we who know and keep the Law —
As we who walk Jerusalem
With pilgrim step and pallid cheek.
How earnestly they silent pray
To keep their Golden Rule alway,
To do no thing, or night or day,
Though tempted by a diadem,
They would not others do to them!

XVIII

And wee, brown wives, on high, wild steeps
Of terraced rice or bamboo patch
Where toil, hard toil incessant, keeps
Sweet virtue, sweet sleep, and a thatch,
They hear and hold, with closer fold,
Their bare, brown babes against the cold.
They croon and croon, with soothing care,
To babes meshed in their mighty hair,
And loving, crooning, breathe a prayer.

L I G H T

XIX

The great notes pass, pass on and on,
As light sweeps up the doors of dawn,
And now the strong notes are no more,
But feebler tones wail out and cry,
As sad things that have lost their way
At night and dare not bide the day
But turn back to the shrine to die,
And steal in softly through the door
And gently fade along the floor.

XX

The barefoot priest slow fades from sight,
Faint and more faint the last notes fall;
You hear them now, then not at all,
And now the last note of the night
Wails out, as when a lover cries
At night, and at the altar dies.

XXI

How sweet, how sad, how piteous sweet
This last note at the bowed monk's feet
That dies as dies some saintly light —
That dies so like the sweet swan dies —
So loving sad, so tearful sweet,
This last, lost note — Good night, good night.
Good night to holy Buddha's bell —

L I G H T

Bonsho-no-oto! All is well —
A mist is rising to the eyes!

CANTO II

I

THIS water town of Tokio
Is as a church with priests at prayer,
With restful silence everywhere,
Or night or day, or high or low.
You sometimes hear a turtle dove,
A locust trilling from his tree
In chorus with his mated love,
May see a raven in the air,
Wide-winged and high, but even he
Is as a shadow in the stream,
As dreamful, silent as a dream.

II

They could but note the silent maids
That carried, with a mother's care,
The silent baby, ofttimes bare
As birthtime through their Caran shades.
Ten thousand babies, everywhere,
But not one wail, or day or night,
To put the locust's love to flight,
Or mar the chorus of the dove.

L I G H T

And why? Why, they were born of love:
Born soberly, born sanely, clean,
As Indian babes of old were born
Ere yet the white man's face was seen,
Ere yet the sensuous white man came;
Born clean as love, of lovelight born
Some long lost Rocky Mountain morn
Where snow-topt turrets first took flame
And flashed God's image in God's name!

III

Tell me, my flint-scarred pioneer,
My skin-clad Carson, mountaineer,
Who met red Sioux, met dusk Modoc,
Red hand to hand in battle shock
Where men but met to dare and die,
Did ever you once see or hear
One poor brown Indian baby cry?

IV

The long, hot march by ashen plain,
The burning trail by lava bed,
Babes lashed to back in corded pain
Until the swollen bare legs bled,
But on and on their mothers led,
If but to find a place to die.
Yet who, of all men that pursued

L I G H T

This dying race, year after year,
By burning plain or beetling wood,
Did ever see, did ever hear,
One bleeding Indian baby cry?

v

The starving mother's breasts were dry,
There scarce was time to stop and drink,
The swollen legs grew black as ink —
There was not even time to die.
And yet, through all this fifty year,
What hounding man did ever hear
One piteous Indian baby cry?

VI

Nay, they were born as men were born
Far back in Jacob's Bible morn;
Were born of love, born lovingly,
Unlike the fretful child of lust,
When love gat love and trust gat trust —
And trusting, dared to silent die
In torture and disdain a tear,
If mother willed, nor question why.
Yea, I have seen so many die,
This cruel, hard, half-hundred year,
And I have cried, to see, to hear —
But never heard one baby cry.

L I G H T

VII

Shot down in Castle Rocks I lay
One midnight, lay as one shot dead,
A lad, and lone, years, years of yore.
I heard deep Sacramento roar,
Saw Shasta glitter far away —
I never saw such moon before
And yet I could not turn my head,
Nor move my lips to cry or say.
Red arrows in both form and face
Held form and face tight pinned in place
Against the gnarled, black chaparral,
As one fast nailed against a wall
With scant half room to wholly fall —
The hot, thick, gurgling, gasping breath,
The thirst, the thirsting unto death!

VIII

And then a child against my feet
Crawled feebly and crept close to die;
I moaned, "Oh baby, won't you cry?
'Twould be as music piteous sweet
To hear in this dread place of death
Just one lorn cry, just one sweet breath
Of life, here 'mid the moonlit dead,
The mingled dead, white men and red.

L I G H T

IX

"Oh bleeding, blood-red baby, cry
Just once before I, choking, die!
And maybe some white man will hear
In yonder fortress'd camp anear
And bring blest drink for you and I —
Oh, baby, please, please, baby, cry!"

X

A crackling in the chaparral
And then a lion in the clear
From which the dying babe had crept,
Swift as a yellow sunbeam, leapt
And stood so tall, so near, so near!
So cruel near, so sinuous, tall —
Some Landseer's picture on a wall.

XI

I never saw such length of limb,
Such arm as God had given him!
His paws, they swallowed up the earth,
His midnight eyes shot arrows out
The while his tail whipped swift about —
His tail was surely twice his girth!

XII

His nostrils wide with smell of blood
Reached out above us where he stood

L I G H T

And snuffed the dank, death-laden air
Till half his yellow teeth were bare.
His yellow length was bare and lank —
I never saw such hollow flank;
'Twas as a grave is, as a pall,
A flabby black flank — scarce at all!

XIII

He sudden quivered, tail to jaws,
Crouched low, unsheathed his shining claws —
"Oh, baby, baby, won't you cry,
Just once before we two must die?"
I felt him spring, clutch up, then leap
Swift down the rock-built, broken steep;
I heard a crunch of bones, but I —
I did not hear that baby cry!

CANTO III

I

I WOULD forget — help me forget,
The while we fondly linger yet
The flower-field so sweet, so sweet,
With Buddha at fair Fuji's feet.
Fair Fuji-san, throned Queen of air!
Fair woman pure as maiden's prayer;
As pure as prayer to the throne
Of God, as lone as God, as lone

L I G H T

As Buddha at her feet in prayer —
Fair Fuji-san, so more than fair!

II

Fair Fuji-san, Kamkura, and
Reposeful, calm Buddha the blest,
With folded hands that rest and rest
On old Kamkura's blood-soaked sand.
Here russet apples hang at hand
So russet rich that when they fall
'Tis as if some gold-bounden ball
Sank in the loamy, warm, wet sand
Where hana, kusa, carpet earth
That never knows one day of dearth.

III

Kamkura, where Samurai bled,
Where Buddha sits to rest and rest!
Was ever spot so beauteous, blest?
Was ever red rose quite so red?

IV

Fair Fuji from her mountain chine
Above her curtained courts of pine
Looks down on calm Kamkura's sea
So tranquil, dreamful, restfully
You fold your arms across your breast

L I G H T

And rest with her, with Buddha rest,
While silence musks the warm sea air —
Just silence, silence everywhere.

V

Here midst this rest, this pure repose,
This benediction, peace, and prayer,
That as religion was, and where
A breath of senko blessed the air,
The erstwhile children of the snows
Came silently and sat them down
Within a Kusa coigne that lay
Above the buried Bushi town,
Above the dimpled, beauteous Bay
Of sun and shadow, gold and brown,
And Care blew by the other way —
A breath, a butterfly, a fay.

VI

And one was as fair Fuji, fair,
True, trusting as some maid at prayer,
Aye, one as Buddha was, but one
Was turbulent of blood and was
An instant of the earth and sun;
As when the ice-tied torrent thaws
And sudden leaps from frost and snow
Headlong and lawless, far below —

L I G H T

As when the sap flows suddenly
And warms the wind-tost mango tree.

VII

He caught her hand, he pressed her side,
He pressed her close and very close,
He breathed her as you breathe a rose,
Nor was in any wise denied.
Her comely, shapely limbs pushed out
As elden on her golden shore;
Her long, strong arms reached round about
And bent along the flowered floor,
While full length on her back she lay
Like some wild, beauteous beast at play.

VIII

He thrust him forward, caught her, caught
Her form as if she were of naught.
His outstretched face was as a flame,
His breath was as a furnace is,
He kissed her mouth with such mad kiss
Her rich, full lips shut tight with shame.

IX

As one of old who tilled the mould,
Took triple strength from earth and thrust
His burly foeman to the dust,
She sprang straight up, and springing threw

L I G H T

Him from her with such voltage he
Knew not how he might, writhing, rise,
Or dare to meet again those eyes
That seemed to burn him through and through;
Or daring, how could he undo
His coward, selfish deed of shame
Enforced as in religion's name?
And she so trustful, so alone!
'Twas as if some sweet, sacred nun
Had opened wide her door to one
Who slew her on her altar stone.

X

She passed and silent passed and slow.
What strength, what length of limb, what eyes!
She left him lying low, so low,
So crested and so surely slain
He deemed he never more might rise,
Or rising, see her face again.
And yet, her look was not of hate,
But pity, as akin to pain;
And when she touched the temple gate
She paused, turned, beckoned he should go,
Go wash his hands of carnal clay
And go alone his selfish way —
Forever, ever and a day!

L I G H T

CANTO IV

I

HOW cold she grew, how chilled, how changed,
Since that loathed scene by Nippon's sea!
No longer flexile, trustful, she
Held him aloof, hushed and estranged,
A fallen star, yet still her star,
And she his heaven, earth, his all,
To follow, worship, near or far,
Let good befall or ill befall.
But he was silent. He had sold
His birthright, sold for even less
Than any poor, cheap pottage mess,
His right to speak forth, warm and bold,
And look her unshamed in the face.
Mute, penitent, he kept his place,
As silent as that Nippon saint
That knew not prayer, praise, or plaint.

II

Saint Silence seems some maid of prayer,
God's arm about her when she prays
And where she prays and everywhere,
Or storm-strewn or sun-down days.
What ill to Silence can befall,
Since Silence knows no ill at all?

L I G H T

III

Saint Silence seems some twilight sky
That leans as with her weight of stars
To rest, to rest, no more to roam,
But rest and rest eternally.
She loosens and lets down the bars,
She brings the kind-eyed cattle home,
She breathes the fragrant field of hay
And heaven is not far away.

IV

The deeps of soul are still the deeps
Where stately Silence ever keeps
High court with calm Nirvana, where
No shallows break the noisy shore
Or beat, with sad, incessant roar,
The fettered, fevered world of care
As noisome vultures fret the air.

V

The star-sown seas of thought are still,
As when God's plowmen plant their corn
Along the mellow grooves at morn
In patient trust to wait His will.
The star-sown seas of thought are wide,
But voiceless, noiseless, deep as night;
Disturb not these, the silent seas

L I G H T

Are sacred unto souls allied,
As golden poppies unto bees.
Here, from the first, rude giants wrought,
Here delved, here scattered stars of thought
To grow, to bloom in years unborn,
As grows the gold-horned yellow corn.

VI

They lay low-bosomed on the bay
Of Honolulu, soft the breeze
And soft the dreamful light that lay
On Honolulu's Sabbath seas —
The ghost of sunshine gone away —
Red roses on the dust of day,
Pale, pink, red roses in the west
Where lay in state dead Day at rest.

VII

Their dusky boatman set his face
From out the argent, opal sea
Tow'rd where his once proud, warlike race
Lay housed in everlasting dust.
He sang low-voiced, sad, silently,
In listless chorus with the tide,
Because his race was not, because
His sun-born race had dared, defied
The highest, holiest of His laws

L I G H T

And so fell stricken and so died —
Died stricken of dread leprosy
Begot of lust — prone in the dust —
Degenerating love to lust.

VIII

Sweet sandal-wood burned bow and stern
In colored, shapely crates of clay;
Sweet sandal-wood long laid away,
Long caverned with dead battle kings
Whose dim ghosts rise betimes and burn
The torch and touch sweet taro strings —
Such giant, stalwart, stately kings!

IX

Sweet sandal-wood, long ages torn
From cloud-capt steeps where thunders slept,
Then hidden where dead giants kept
Their sealed Walhalla, waiting morn —
Deep-hidden, till such sweet perfume
Betrayed their long-forgotten tomb.

X

The sea's perfume and incense lay
About, above, lay everywhere;
The sea swung incense through the air —
The censer, Honolulu's Bay.

III

L I G H T

And then the song, the soft, low rune,
As sad, as if dead kings kept tune.

XI

The moon hung twilight from each horn,
Soft, silken twilight, soft to touch
As baby lips — and over much
Like to the baby breath of morn.
Huge, five-horned stars swung left and right
O'er argent, opal, amber night.

XII

What changeful, dreamful, ardent light,
When Mauna Loa, far afield,
Uprose and shook his yellow shield
Below the battlements of night;
Below the Southern Cross, o'er seas
That sang such silent symphonies!

XIII

Far lava peaks still lit the night,
Like holy candles foot and head,
That dimly burned above the dead,
Above the dead and buried Light.
There rose such perfume of the sea,
Such Sabbath breath, soft, silently,
As when some burning censer swings,
As when some surpliced choir sings.

L I G H T

XIV

He scarce had lived save in such fear,
But now yon mitered tongues of flame
That tipped the star-lit lava peak
Brought back some fervor to his cheek
And made him half forget his shame.
He could but heed, he could but hear
That call across the walls of night
From triple mitered tongues of Light,
That soulful, silent, perfumed night.
He said — and yet he said no word;
No word he said, yet all she heard,
So close their souls lay, in such Light,
That holy Honolulu night.

XV

“Lies yonder Nebo’s mount, my Soul? —
The Promised Land beyond, beyond
The grave of rest, the broken bond,
Where manly force must lose control,
Must press the grapes and fill the bowl,
Go round and round, rest, rise up, eat,
Tread grapes, then wash the wearied feet?

XVI

“I know I have enough of bliss,
I know full well I should not dare

L I G H T

To ask a deeper joy than this,
This scene, your presence, this soft air,
This incense, this deep sense of rest
Where long-sought, sweet Arcadia lies
Against these gates of Paradise.

XVII

"And yet, hear me, I dare ask more.
Lone Adam had all Paradise
And still how poor he was, how poor,
With all things his beneath the skies!
Aye, sweet it were to roam or rest,
To ever rest and ever roam
As you might reck and reckon best;
But still there comes a sense of home,
Of hearthstone, happy babes at play,
And you and I — not far away.

XVIII

"Nay, do not turn aside your face —
' Be fruitful ye and multiply'
Meant all; it meant the human race,
And he or she shall surely die
Despised and pass to nothingness
Who does not love the little dress,
The heaven in the mother's eyes,
The holy, sacred, sweet surprise

L I G H T

The time she tells how truly blest,
With face laid blushing to his breast.

XIX

"How flower-like the little frock —
The daffodil forerunning spring —
The doll-like shoes, socks, everything,
And each a secret, secret stored!
And yet each day the little hoard,
As careful merchants note their stock,
Is noted with such happy care
As only angel mothers share.

XX

"At last to hear her rock and rock —
Behold her bowed Madonna face!
She lifts her baby from its place,
Pulls down the crumpled, dampened frock,
And never Cleopatra guessed
The queenliness, the joy, the pride,
She knows with baby to her breast —
His chub fists churning either sides!

XXI

"The bravest breast faith ever bared
For brother, country, creed or friend,
However high the aim or end,
Was that brave breast a baby shared

With kicking, fat legs half unfrocked,
The while sweet mother rocked and rocked."

CANTO V

I

AS when first blossoms feel first bees,
As when the squirrel hoists full sail
And leaps his world of maple trees
And quirks his saucy, tossy tail;
As when Vermont's tall sugar trees
First feel sweet sap, then don their leaves
In haste — a million Mother Eves;
As when strange winds stir strong-built ships
Long ice-bound fast in Arctic seas,
So she, the strong, full woman now,
Felt new life thrilling breast and brow
And tingled to her finger tips.
Her limbs pushed out, outreached her head
As if to say — she nothing said.
But something of the tender light
That lit her girl face that first night,
The time she pulling poppies sat
The sod and saw the golden sheep
Safe housed within the hollowed deep,
Was hers; and how she blushed thereat!
Yet blushing so, still silent sat.

L I G H T

II

She would forget his weakness, yet
Try as she would, could not forget.
He knew her thought. She raised her head
And searched his soul, and searching said:
"He who would save the world must stand
Hard by the world with steel-mailed hand
And save by smiting hip and thigh.
The world needs truth, tall truth and grand,
And keen sword-cuts that thrust to kill.
The man who climbed the windy hill
To talk, is talking, climbing still,
And could not help or hurt a fly.
The stoutest swimmer and most wise
Swims somewhat with the sweeping stream,
Yet leads, leads unseen as a dream.
The strong fool breasts the flood and dies,
The weak fool turns his back and flies."

III

He did not answer, could not dare
Lift his shamed eyes to her fair face,
But looked right, left, looked anywhere,
And mused, mused mutely out of place:
"If yonder creedists may not teach,
For all their books, and bravely preach

L I G H T

That here, right here, the womb of night
Gave us God's first-born, holy Light,
Why, pity, nor yet blame them quite;
Because they know not, cannot read,
Save as commanded by some creed.
What eons they may have to wait
Within their wall, without the gate,
Nor once dare lift their eyes to look
Beyond their blinding creed and book,
We know not, but we surely know
Yon lava-lifted, star-tipt height
Is bannered still by that first Light.
We know this phosphorescent glow,
At every dip of dripping oar,
Is but lost bits of Light below,
Where moves God's spirit as of yore.
Aye, here, right here, from out the night,
God spake and said: "Let there be light!"

IV

"And dare ask doubting, creed-made men
Why we so surely know and how?
Why here 'the waters,' now as then?
Why here 'the waters,' then as now?
We know because we read, yet read
So little that we much must heed.
We read: 'God's spirit moved upon

L I G H T

The waters' ere that burst of dawn.
What waters? Why, 'The Waters,' these,
These soundless, silent, sundown seas.

V

"The morning of the world was here,
Twas here 'He made dry land appear,'
Here 'Darkness lay upon the deep.'
What deep? This deep, the deepest deep
That ever rolled beneath the sun
When night and day were then as one
And dreamless day lay fast asleep,
Rocked in this cradle of the deep."

VI

She would not, could not be denied
Her thought, her theme but turned once more,
As turns the all-devouring tide
Against a stubborn unclean shore,
With lifted face and soul aflame,
And spake as speaking in God's name —
With face raised to the living God:
"Hear me! How pitiful the plea
Of men who plead their temperance,
Of men who know not one first sense
Of self-control, yet, fire-shod,
Storm forth and rage intemperately

L I G H T

At sins that are but as a breath,
Compared with their low lives of death!

VII

“And oh, for prophet’s tongue or pen
To scourge, not only, and accuse
The childless mother, but such men
As know their loves but to abuse!
Give me the brave, child-loving Jew,
The full-sexed Jew of either sex,
Who loves, brings forth and nothing reck
Of care or cost, as Christians do —
Dulled souls who will not hear or see
How Christ once raised his lowly head
And, all rebuking, gently said,
The while he took them tenderly,
‘Let little ones come unto me.’

VIII

“The true Jew lover keeps the Way.
For clean, serene, and contrite heart
The bride and bridegroom kneel apart
Before the bridal bed and pray.

IX

“Behold how great the bride’s estate!
Behold how holy, pure the thought
That high Jehovah welcomes her



L I G H T

In partnership, to coin, create
The fairest form He yet has wrought
Since Adam's clay knew breath and stir:
To glory in her daughters, sons;
To be God's tabernacle, tent,
The keeper of the covenant,
The mother of His little ones!

X

"Go forth among this homeless race,
This landless race that knows no place
Or name or nation quite its own,
And see their happy babes at play,
Or palace, Ghetto, rich or poor,
As thick as birds about the door
At morn, some sunny Vermont May,
Then think of Christ and these alone.
Yet ye deride, ye jeer, ye jibe,
To see their plenteous babes; ye say
'Behold the Jew and all his tribe!'

XI

"Yet Solomon upon his throne
Was not more kingly crowned than they
These Jews, these jeered Jews of to-day —
More surely born to lord, to lead,
To sow the land with Abram's seed;

L I G H T

Because their babes are healthful born
And welcomed as the welcome morn.

XII

“Hear me this prophecy and heed!
Except we cleanse us, kirk and creed,
Except we wash us, word and deed,
The Jew shall rule us, reign the Jew.
And just because the Jew is true,
Is true to nature, true to truth,
Is clean, is chaste, as trustful Ruth
Who stood amid the alien corn
In tears that far, dim, doubtful morn —
Who bore us David, Solomon —
The Babe, that far, first Christmas dawn.

XIII

“You shrink, are angered at my speech?
You dare avert your doubtful face
Because I name this chaste, strange race?
So be it then; there lies the beach,
And up the beach the ways divide.
I would not leave the truth untold
To win the whole world to my side,
Nor would I spare your selfish pride,
Your carnal coarseness, lustful lie,
For that would be to let you die.

L I G H T

Come! yonder lifts the clear, white Light
For seamen, souls sea-tost at night.

XIV

"I see the spiked Agave's plume,
The pepsin's plum, acacia's bloom
Far up beyond tall cocoa trees,
Tall tamarind and mango brown,
That gird the pretty, peaceful town.
That lane leads up, the church looks down —
There lie the ways, now which of these?
Bear with me, I must dare be true.
The nation, aye, the Christian race,
Now fronts its stern Sphynx, face to face,
And I must say, say here to you,
What'e'er the cost of love, of fame,
The Christian is a thing of shame —
Must say because you prove it true,
The better Christian is the Jew.

XV

"I know you scorn the narrow deeds
Of men who make their god of creeds —
Yon men as narrow as the miles
That bank their rare, sweet flower-fed isles,
But come, my Lost Star, come with me
To yon fond church, high-built and fair,

L I G H T

For God is there, as everywhere,
Or Arctic snow or argent sea."

XVI

He looked far up the mango lane
Below the wide-boughed banyan tree;
He looked to her, then looked again,
As one who tries yet could not see
But one steep, narrow, upward way:
"You said two ways, here seems but one,
Or set of moon or rise of sun,
But one way to the perfect day,
And I will go. And you must stay?"
She looked far up the steep of stone
And said: "Aye, go, but not alone."

XVII

The boat's prow pushed the cocoa shore,
The man spake not, but, leaning o'er,
Strong-armed, he drew her to his side
And was not anywise denied.
He pointed to the failing fire,
That still tipt lava peak and spire,
While stars pinned round the robe of night;
'Twas here God said, "Let there be Light!"

L I G H T

XVIII

A little church, a lava wall,
A soft light looking gently down,
The Light of Christ, the second light,
Where two as one passed up the town.
She gave her hand, she gave her all,
And said, as such brave women might,
With ample right, in hallowed cause:
"As it in the beginning was,
So let the man-child be full born
Of Love, of Light, the Light of Morn!"

BOOK FOURTH



CANTO I

I

AND which of all Hawaii's isles
Of sandal wood and singing wilds
Received and housed this maiden rare —
This bravest, best, since Eve's despair?
It matters not; enough to know
Night-blooming trumpets ever blow
Love's tuneful banner to the breeze
In chorus with the ardent seas;
That Juno walks her mountain wall
In peacock plumes the whole year through.
You hear her gaudy lover call
From dawn till dusk, then see them fall
From out the clouds far, far below,
And droop and drift slow to and fro —
Dusk rainbows blending with the dew.

L I G H T

II

And had he won her? He had wed,
But now it was that he most woo,
Must keep alone his widowed bed
Or sit and woo the whole night through.
He plead. He could not touch her hand;
Her eyes held anger and command
And memories of a trustful time
He would have made her muck and slime.

III

He plead his perfect life, still plead;
But spurning him she mocking said:
"You would have trailed me in the dust
In very drunkenness of lust —
And now you dare to meekly plead
Your love of Light, your studious youth,
Your strenuous toil, your quest of truth,
Your perfect life! Indeed! Indeed!

IV

"Behold the pale, wan, outworn wife
Of him who pleads his perfect life!
Her step is slow, she waits for death;
Hear, hear her wan babe's hollow cry!
He scarce can cry above a breath.
Poor babe! begotten but to die,

L I G H T

Or, harder fate, live feebly on,
The shame of mother, curse of state —
Half-witted, worthless, jest of fate.

V

“Behold God’s image, fashioned tall
As heaven, stooping down to crawl
Upon his belly as a snake,
Ere yet his sense is well awake,
Ere yet his force has come, ere yet
The child-wife knows but to regret.
And lo! the greatest is the least;
For man lies lower than the beast.

VI

“Such pity that sweet love should lie
Prone, strangled in its bed of shame,
And no man dare to publish why!
Such pity that in slain Love’s name
The weak bring forth the weaker, bring
The leper, idiot, anything
That lawless passion can beget!
Sweet pity, pity for them all —
The child that cries, child-wife that dies,
The weakling that may linger yet
A feeble day to feebly fall —
As food for sword or cannon ball,

L I G H T

For prison wall or charity
Or fruit of gruesome gallows tree!

VII

"But pity most poor man, blind man,
Whose passions stoop him to a span.
Why, man, each well-born man was born
To dwell in everlasting morn,
To top the mountain as a tower,
A thousand years of pride and power;
To face the four winds with the face
Of youth until full length he lies —
Still God-like, even as he dies.

VIII

"Could I but teach lorn man to live,
But teach low man to truly love,
Could I but teach blind man to see,
How gladly he would turn to me
And give great thanks, and ever give
Glad heed, as to some 'soft-voiced dove.

IX

"The burning cities of the plain,
The high-built harlot, Babylon,
The bannered mur'ls of Rome undone,
That rose again and fell again
To ashes and to heaps of dust,

L I G H T

All died because man lived in vain;
Because man sold his soul to lust.

X

"And count what crimes have come of it!
I say all sins, or said or writ,
Lie gathered here in this dark pit
Of man's licentious, mad desire,
Where woman's form is ruthless thrown,
As on some sacrificial stone,
And burned as in a living fire,
To leave but ashes, rue, and ire.

XI

"Aye, even crimes as yet unnamed
Are born of man's degrading lust.
The wildest beast man ever tamed,
Or ever yet has come to know —
The vilest beast would feel disgust
Could it but know how low, how low
God's image sinks in muck and slime,
In crimes so deeper than all crime,
In slime that hath not yet a name,
And yet man knows no whit of shame!

XII

"Poor, weak, mad man, so halt, so blind!
Poor, weak, mad man that must carouse

L I G H T

And prostitute what he should house
And husband for his coming kind!
Behold the dumb beasts at glad morn,
Clean beasts that hold them well in hand!
How nobler thus to lord the land,
How nobler thus to love your race,
To house its health and strength and grace,
Than rob the races yet unborn
And build new Babylons to scorn!

XIII

"I say that each man has a right,
The right the beast has to be born
Full-flowered, beauteous, free and fair
As wide-winged bird that rides the air;
Not as a babe that cries all night,
Cries, cries in darkness for such Light
As man should give it at its birth.
I say that poor babe has a right,
The right, at least, of each wild beast —
Aye, red babe, black, white, west or east,
To rise at birth and lord the earth,
Strong-limbed, long-limbed, robust and free
As supple beast or towering tree.

L I G H T

XIV

"God's pity for the breasts that bear
A little babe, then banish it
To stranger hands, to alien care,
To live or die as chance sees fit.
Poor, helpless hands, reached anywhere,
As God gave them to reach and reach,
With only helplessness in each!
Poor little hands, pushed here, pushed there,
And all night long for mother's breast:
Poor, restless hands that will not rest
And gather strength to reach out strong
To mother in the rosy morn!
Nay, nay, they gather scorn for scorn
And hate for hate the lorn night long —
Poor, dying babe! to reach about
In blackness, as a thing cast out!

XV

"God's pity for the thing of lust
Who bears a frail babe to be thrust
Forth from her arms to alien thrall,
As shutting out the light of day,
As shutting off God's very breath!
But thrice God's pity, let us pray,
For her who bears no babe at all,

L I G H T

But, grinning, leads the dance of death.
That sexless, steel-braced breast of bone
Is like to some assassin cell,
A whitéd sepulcher of stone,
A graveyard at the gates of hell,
A mart where motherhood is sold,
A house of murders manifold!"

CANTO II

I

HE heard; he could but bow his head
In silence, penitence, and shame,
Confess the truth of all she said
Of crimes committed in Love's name,
Nor beg the sacred seal of red
To marriage bond and marriage bed.

II

And that was all, aye, that was all
For days, for days that seemed as years.
He still must woo, put by her fears,
Make her his friend, let what befall;
Bide her sweet will and, loving, bide
Meek dalliance with his maiden bride.

L I G H T

III

One night in May, such soulful night
Of cherry blossoms, birds, such birds
As burst with song, that sing outright
Because so glad they cannot keep
Their song, but sing out in their sleep!
Such noisy night, a cricket's night,
A night of Katydids, of dogs
That bayed and bayed the vast, full moon
In chorus with glad, tuneful frogs —
With May's head in the lap of June.
How hot, how sultry hot the room!
Their garden tree in perfect bloom
Gave out fair Nippon's full perfume —
The night grew warm and very warm,
And warm her warm, full-bosomed form!

IV

How vital, virile, strong with life,
The world without, the maiden wife!
How wondrous fair the world, how fair
The maid meshed in her mighty hair!
The man uprose, caught close a skin,
A lion's skin, threw this about
His great, Herculean, pent-up form,
Thrust feet into his slippered shoes,

L I G H T

Then, with a lion's force and frown
He strode the wide room up and down,
The skin's claws flapping at his thews.
He turned, he caught her suddenly
And instant wrapped her close within;
Then down the stairs and back and out
Beneath the blossomed Nippon tree —
Against the tree he pressed her form,
He was so warm, so very warm —
He held her close as close could be
Against the blossomed cherry tree.

v

He held with all his might and main —
Held her so hard he shook the tree,
Because he trembled mightily
And shook in his hard, happy pain —
Because he quivered as a pine
When tropic storm sweeps up the line,
As when some swift horse, harnessed low,
Frets hard and bites the bit to go.
She laughed such low, sweet laugh, and said,
The while she raised her pretty head,
“Please, please, be gentle good to me,
And please don't hurt the cherry tree.”

L I G H T

VI

The warm land lay as in a swoon,
Full length, the happy lap of June —
A fair bride fainting with delight
And fond forgetfulness with night.
How warm the world was and how wise
The world is in its love of life,
Its hate of harshness, hate of strife,
Its love of Eden, peace that lies
In love-set, leaf-sown Paradise!

VII

How generous, how good is night
To give its length to man's delight —
To give its strength from dusk till morn
To push the planted yellow corn!
How warm this garden was, how warm
With life, with love in any form!
Two lowly crickets, clad in black,
Came shyly forth, shrank sudden back —
Then chirped in chorus, side by side;
And oh, their narrow world was wide
As oceans, light their hearts as air,
And oh, their little world was fair,
And oh, their little world was warm
Because each had a lover there,
Because they loved and didn't care.

L I G H T

VIII

How languid all things with delight,
With sensuous longings, sweet desire
That burned as with immortal fire,
Immortal love that burns to live
And, lives to burn, to take, to give,
Create, bring forth, and loving share
With God the fruitage, flesh or flower —
Just loving, loving, bud or bower,
Or bee or birdling, small or great,
Just loving, loving to create,
With just one caution, just one care —
That all creation shall be fair.

IX

The very garden wall was warm
With gorgeous sunshine gone away;
Each vine, with eager, reaching arm,
Clung amorous, tiptoed to kiss,
With eager lips, the ardent clay
That held her to its breast of bliss.

X

Blown cherry blossoms basking lay,
A perfect pathway of perfume;
The tiger lily scarce had room
For roses bending in a storm

L I G H T

Of laden sweetness more than sweet.
The moon leaned o'er the garden wall,
Then, smiling, tiptoed up her way,
The while she let one full beam fall,
Love-laden in the sensuous heat,
So sweet, so warm, so still withal,
Love heard pink cherry blossoms fall.

XI

A Katydid laid his green thigh
Against another leaf-green form
And so began to sing and sigh,
As if it were his time to die
From stress and strain of passion's storm —
He, too, was warm and very warm.

XII

A tasseled hammock, silken red,
Swung, hung hard by, and foot and head,
A blossom-laden cherry tree.
This famed tree of the Japanese,
Whatever other trees may be,
Is held most sacred of all trees:
Not quite because of its perfume,
Not all because of rich pink bloom,
But much because its blossomed boughs
Not only list to lover's vows,

L I G H T

But true to lovers, ever true,
Refuse to let one moonbeam through.

XIII

Here, close beneath this Nippon tree,
The sweetest tree this side Cathay,
The lover's tree of mystery,
Where not a thread of moonlight lay,
While waves of moonlight laughed and played
At hide and seek the other way,
He threw her, full length, from his arm;
Full length, then raised her drooping head,
Threw back the skin and, blushing red,
He sought to say — He nothing said!
He nothing did but blush and blush
And feel his hot blood rush and rush —
The very hammock's fringe was warm
The while he leaned low from his place
And felt her warm breath in his face.

XIV

Then, all abashed, he trembled so
He clutched the hammock hard and fast,
He held so hard it came, at last,
To swing, to swing fast to and fro.
Such awkwardness! He clutched, let go,
Then clutched so hard he shook each tree

L I G H T

Till perfumed silence came to see —
Till fragrance fell upon her hair,
Such hair, a storm of pink and snow.
How fair, how fair, how sensuous fair,
Half hidden in a pink snow-storm;
And yet how warm, how more than warm!

XV

How shamed he was! His great heart beat
As beats some signal for retreat.
This stupid, bravest of brave men,
Confused, dismayed, hung down his head,
Then turned and helplessly had fled,
Had she not reached a timid hand
And, half as pleading, half command
And half-way laughing, shyly said,
From out her snood of snow and rain,
“Please shake the Nippon trees again!”

XVI

He shook the trees; a fragrant shower
On laughing face and loosened hair —
A flash of perfume and of flower —
Oh, she was fair and very fair!
Then with a sudden strength he plucked
His red-ripe cherry from the tree,
Wound 'round the skin and loosely tucked

L I G H T

The folds about her modestly,
Then on and up with giant stride
He bore his blushing maiden bride,
So cherry ripe, so cherry red,
And laid her in her bridal bed —
Laid perfumed bride, laid flesh and flower,
Half drowning from the fragrant shower.
What snows strewn in her ample hair,
What low, light laughter everywhere,
Or cherry tree, or step or stair!
Just low, soft laughter, cherry bloom,
Just love and love's unnamed perfume.

XVII

He tossed the lion's skin aside,
With folded arms leaned o'er his bride,
Turned low the light, then stood full length,
Then strode in all his supple strength
The room a time, tossed back his hair,
Then to his bride, swift bent to her,
And kneeled, as lowliest worshiper.

XVIII

And then he threw him by her side,
His long, strong limbs thrown out full length,
His two fists full of housed-up strength.
What pride, what manly, kingly pride

L I G H T

That he had conquered, bravely slain
His baser self, was self again!

XIX

He held a hand, exceeding small,
He breathed her perfume, threw her hair
Across her breast with such sweet care
He scarce did touch her form at all.
Again he rose, strode to and fro,
Came back and turned the light quite low.

XX

He bowed his face close to her feet;
Now he would rise, then would not rise;
He bent, blushed to his very eyes,
Then sudden pushed aside the sheet
And kissed her pink and pearly toes.
Their perfume was the perfect rose
When perfect summer, passion, heat,
Points both hands of the clock straight up,
As when we lift and drain the cup,
As when we lift two hands and pray
When we have lived our bravest day,
The horologe of life may stop
With both hands pointing to the top.

L I G H T

XXI

Then suddenly, in strength and pride,
Full length he threw him at her side
And caught again her timid hand,
A bird that had escaped his snare.
He caught it hard, he held it there,
He begged her pardon, begged and prayed
She would forgive him, then he laid
His face to her face and the land
Was like a fairy land. They lay
As children well outworn at play.

XXII

As children bounding from their bed,
So rested, radiant, satisfied
With self and selfishness denied,
Life seemed some merry roundelay.
They laughed with early morn, they led,
So full of soul, of strength were they,
The laughing dance of love all day.

XXIII

All day? A month of days, and each
A song, a sermon, but to teach,
A holy book to teach the truth
Of endless, laughing, joyous youth.
He stood so tall, he stood so strong —

L I G H T

As one who holds the keys yet keeps
His treasure housed in shining heaps,
Until all life was as a song.

XXIV

At last, one warmest morning, she
Held close his hand, held hard the door,
Would scarce let go, said o'er and o'er,
"Good-by! Come early back to me!"
And then, close up beside, as one
Might eager seek some stout oak tree
When storm is sudden threatened, she
Put up her pretty, pouting mouth,
Half closed her laughing, saucy eyes —
Such lips, such roses from the south,
The warm, south side of Paradise! —

XXV

"Good-by! Come early back to me!"
Why, he heard nothing else all day,
Saw nothing else, knew naught but this,
Their fond, fond, first full-flowered kiss,
Wherein she led the rosy way,
As is her right, as it should be.
He looked his watch hard in its face
A hundred times, he blushed, he smiled,
Did leave his friends and lightly pace

L I G H T

The street, half laughing, as a child.
A million kisses! He'd had one —
Scant one, his joy had just begun!

XXVI

Come early? He was at the gate
And through the door ere yet the day
Had kneeled down in the west to pray
Its vesper prayer, all brimming o'er
And blushing that he could not wait
To kiss her just once more, once more;
Take breath then kiss her o'er and o'er.

XXVII

By some sweet chance he found her there,
Close fenced against the winding stair,
With no escape, behind, before.
She put her lips up as to plead
She might be spared a little space;
But there was mischief in her face,
A world of frolic and of fun,
And he could run as he could read,
Aye, he could read as he could run.
And then she pushed her full lips out:
"You are so strong, you hold so fast!
You know I tried to guard the door."
And then she frowned, began to pout

L I G H T

And sighed, "Dear, dear, 'tis not well done!"
And then he caught her close, and then
He kissed her, once, twice, thrice again.

XXVIII

Then days and many days of this —
Ah! man, make merry and carouse
Upon your way, within your house,
Hold right there in your manly hand,
Your happy maid who waits your kiss;
Carouse on kisses and carouse
In soul, the livelong, thronging day
When duty tears you well away,
To know what waits you at the gate,
And waiting loves and loves to wait.

XXIX

And how to kiss? A thousand ways,
And each way new and each way true,
And each way true and each way new
Each day for thrice ten thousand days.

XXX

How loyal he who loves, how grand!
He does not tell her overmuch,
He does not sigh or seek to touch
Her garments's hem or lily hand;

L I G H T

She is his soul, his life, his light,
His saint by day, his shrine by night.

XXXI

True love leads home his maiden bride
Low-voiced and tender, soft and true;
He leans to her, to woo, to woo,
As if she still turned and denied —
No selfish touch, no sated kiss
To kill and dig the grave of bliss.

XXXII

True love will hold his maiden bride
As nobles hold inheritance;
He will not part with one small pence
Of her fair strength and stately pride,
But wait serenely at her side,
Supremely proud, full satisfied.

XXXIII

Why, what a glorious thing to view!
Each morn a maiden at your side,
The one fair woman, maid and bride,
With all her sweetness waiting you!
How wise the miser, more than wise,
Who knows to count and keep such prize!

